
Sally Joyce. Burkhart

University of Windsor

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FEEDING THE UNICORN:
PHYLLIS WEBB’S AND TIMOTHY FINDLEY’S PSYCHIC CONNECTION
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

by

Sally Burkhart

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of English
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada
1995
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Name: Sally Burkhart

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DEDICATION

To my mother, Shirley Burkhart
In the words of Phyllis Webb:

You brought me clarity

Gift after gift
I wear ("Suite II," Naked Poems).

iii.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the process of preparing and writing my thesis, I have had the benefit of sound input and generous support from many individuals. I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Louis K. MacKendrick, my thesis advisor, whose incisive yet affable guidance sustained me over the long haul. I would also like to thank my readers, Dr. Alistair MacLeod and Dr. Susan Wendt-Hildebrandt, for their encouragement and their considered comments on my text.

I was pleased to be in correspondence with Dr. John F. Hulcoop, Professor Emeritus in English at the University of British Columbia. He provided me with information on his personal and professional relationships with Timothy Findley and Phyllis Webb.

Phyllis Webb offered comments by letter on my thesis proposal. In referring to her friendship with Timothy Findley, she gave me a moment of insight which found its place in my work.

I am exceptionally grateful to Timothy Findley and William Whitehead. They showed a gracious interest in my topic, granting me a telephone interview. After I had spoken to Mr. Findley, he sent me the manuscript of his radio play The Trials of Ezra Pound to assist with my understanding of the character of Ezra Pound in Famous Last Words. He also extended me the courtesy of the possibility of further contact if needed.
INTRODUCTION

"In the beginning..."

While attending a feminist conference at York University in 1983, Timothy Findley heard his long-time friend, Phyllis Webb, read a new poem to the audience called "Leaning." He was struck by the image of the whole of modern civilization crowding into the Leaning Tower of Pisa. As the "whole culture" leans out, it views a world of distortions as well as one of monuments and monumental motion. Findley, in his memoir Inside Memory, details his perceptions: "The Leaning Tower of Pisa begins to fall in slow motion. Either it will crash upon the earth -- or launch us all into space" (220). He then quotes the last lines of Webb's poem and credits her as being the seminal influence for Not Wanted on the Voyage (1984):

And you, are you still here

tilting in this stranded ark
blind and seeing in the dark

Cary Fagan, in "The Articulate Anger of Phyllis Webb," questions Webb about the effect the poem had on her friend. As Fagan notes, Webb was not aware of "how profoundly it had shaken the whole model of his novel" until Findley's memoir had been published. Webb responds in kind, crediting Findley's novel Famous Last Words (1981) as being one of the
origins for her poem sequence "I, Daniel," published in Water and Light (1984). Webb further comments, "'My interaction with Timothy Findley has been very fruitful... Our friendship or our psychic connection has fed our work.'" (21).

Indeed, documentation of this "psychic connection" is found as early as 1973.¹ In an interview with Graeme Gibson, Findley, responding to a question about the connection between panic and growth in the writing process, reveals his admiration for and his sense of philosophical accord with Phyllis Webb:

I wrote a poem for Phyllis Webb who, by the way, should be part of the great literary mythology of this country and one day will be, in which -- I do most of my thinking sitting on the john, it is one of those places I do a lot of thinking. I can't go to sleep until I've wound down, and the obvious place to wind down quietly, away from the other people in the house, is in there. And the tiles in our shower are red, and Phyllis' poems, and Phyllis' life, dwell much on the art of death in many guises and this poem came to me which I'm not going to be able to quote, but I did have this vision of myself in that red corner bleeding, and I extended that thought to her humorously... (Eleven Canadian Novelists 125).

It is evident from these accounts and other references (Findley's anecdotal tribute "Friends, Romans, Phyllis Webb--Lend Me Your Ears...," West Coast Line, January-February 1991 and various dedications) that the two writers, over a twenty-year span, have continued to be a
source of nurture for one another. Their relationship is in no way a paranormal phenomenon as the term "psychic connection" may connote, but it is rather as John Hulcoop intimates "a shared sensitivity" (Letter to the writer). Not only do they have a similar vision of the human condition -- subject to flux and chaos -- but they also share certain approaches to the challenges posed by theme and structure. In their respective worlds, Webb’s poetic and Findley’s fictional, they delineate dark and bleak landscapes which encompass both the large universal cycles (the root waves of the natural world [as described in Webb’s Naked Poems], the tumult of time) and an enclosed personal space (the naked room, the garden of individual thought). Both writers grapple with the struggle between exterior forces and inner peace, with varying degrees of success in their early works. They attempt to create a momentary stay against the confusion imposed by the "irreconcilable demands of both public and private life," (Stevens 292) but often the result is stasis (Webb) or melodrama (Findley).

In her first three collections of poetry, Trio (1954), Even Your Right Eye (1956), and The Sea Is Also A Garden (1962), Webb is constrained by her world view and her ideas about the nature of poetry. She is balanced tenuously between her need to illustrate the paradoxical essence of experience and her wish to devise an ideal form. She sees
herself in the company of great artists who "bear a crown of darkness," attempting "wholeness" only "to be absolutely broken" ("Breaking," TSIAG 4). She is the martyr/poet sacrificing herself to the world and the word. She is "promised" ("Poet," Trio); she sits in her "vision tree impart[ing] immaculate necessity to murder, ignorance and lust" ("Two Versions," EYRE 54); she walks in Marvell's "garden of necessity/leaving brothers, lovers, Christ/outside [her] walls/where they have wept without/and [she] within" ("Marvell's Garden," EYRE 16-17). In these poems Webb portrays a world and its people founded on the principles of paradox, opposition and contradiction.

Webb views this world, however, cautiously and from a great distance. In effect her work is too studied. She rarely embraces "the flights of fancy" and "extremes of possibility" ("Two Versions"). She prefers the pseudo-security of her position as the poet who is obligated to find the apt concrete symbol for such things as "Patience" (Trio) or the abstract "Shape of Prayer" (EYRE). This earnest attempt to achieve dominion over the landscape of her poetry results in a static beauty which defies the very essence of the fluctuating universe:

Two pears
a slight distance over there
unmoving within the golden

time-globe
("Two Pears: A Still Life,"
TSIAAG 8)
Webb eventually despairs of this constraint in her poetry, crying out for "poems and paragraphs" which are more conducive to the ephemeral nature of life and art:

because I want to die
writing Haiku
or, better,
long lines, clean and syllabic as knotted bamboo. Yes!
("Poetics Against the Angel of Death," TSIAAG 39)

In his early works, Findley also wrestles with issues of constraint. This holding back is apparent in his use of "innocent watcher[s]" (Inside Memory 107) -- Hooker Winslow of The Last of the Crazy People (1967), Ruth Damarosch and a cast of characters in The Butterfly Plague (1969) -- who have clear but limited vision and no authentic voices. They see a blighted landscape (family, a decadent Hollywood), but Findley renders them incapable of positive action within it.

The Last of the Crazy People begins with a young boy surveying the angles of his room with intensity:

All night long, Hooker Winslow's eyes were open. Around the room, the first shadows of morning began to lift themselves out of the corners and up from behind the chairs. The curtains--or something in the curtains--motioned and moved and waved. Hooker watched (1).

As Lorraine York suggests in "The Other Side of Dailiness:"
Photography in the Works of Alice Munro, Timothy Findley, Michael Ondaatje, Margaret Laurence, Hooker, "with a cameralike sensitivity," attempts to come to terms with the "often confusing and contradictory stimuli offered by the external
world" (62). This world consists of "a mother...a father...an aunt" (LOTCP 1) and a brother who erect emotional - and physical - barriers which preclude the possibility of family interplay, let alone intimacy. Hooker finds solace in tending a graveyard of birds killed by his cats and enjoys companionship with those same cats and Iris the maid. However, there is not sufficient nurture to aid him to grow from a boy to a man. The antidote to Hooker's pain is the annihilation of his estranged family. The novel ends with Hooker's institutionalization. There is no catharsis, only the "violent stillness" of death (LOTCP 216; epilogue).

Findley's second novel, The Butterfly Plague, shows the artist constrained by the "damnable quest for perfection" (BP 156; bk. 2, ch. 1) of his craft. In the novel's span of minutes, days and months, Findley seeks to be the chronicler of all human experience and the will to say, "I am" (BP 97; bk. 1, ch. 4). He weights his work with biblical parallels (the concept of the Plague, the Ruth/Naomi relationship), the events of world history (the Holocaust), the evils of Hollywood and many variations on the theme of personal pain. Unfortunately the end result is chaos as opposed to technical control. Findley overextends his own creative purpose. He certainly does not follow the dictate (Mies van der Rohe et al.) "less is more." As Findley
himself says in the preface to the 1986 publication of the novel:

Imagine, now, the neophyte writer who sat down to make The Butterfly Plague. He had ten thousand ideas and a million theories and he kind of wrote like that, too, in tens of thousands and millions. Every paragraph was twice as long as it needed to be. The characters, not unlike the butterflies, arrived on the pages in droves. The events were about as large as events could get...

...But it suffered, you see, from that same dreadful moment...of being written by a man who was suddenly overcome with stagefright. (Or should I say pagefright?) It was a good idea, but its time had not come. Or rather, its writer had not made sure of his craft. He simply wrote it too soon (iii-iv).

In much the same fashion as Webb, Findley (after the negative critical backlash against The Butterfly Plague) aspires to a "poetic against the angel of death" (TSIAAG 39) and a refinement of his storytelling techniques. William Whitehead recounts the tale of Findley's epiphany regarding his creative struggle in Inside Memory:

"One morning, shortly before the play [Can You See Me Yet?] opened [in 1976], Tiff emerged from his room in our downtown apartment in Ottawa and was wreathed in happy smiles. I've got it! he shouted. I've got the next book! It came to me last night when I was sitting up in bed, making notes. Being all too aware of the bitterness and pessimism in most of Tiff's writing in the years since The Butterfly Plague, I made some enthusiastic noises and I cautiously asked what his new book was about. Oh, said Tiff, it's great! And guess what -- it's positive! No more doom and gloom. This book says yes!"(136).

The creative tide having turned for the two writers,
Webb and Findley show a greater structural ease and a maturation of their personal credos in their later works. In her *Naked Poems* (1965), *Wilson’s Bowl* (1980), *Water and Light* (1984), and his *The Wars* (1977), *Famous Last Words* (1981), and *Not Wanted On The Voyage* (1984), both writers illustrate that they are determined to affirm life despite the forces (Findley’s heart of darkness, Webb’s "dark sounds") that would negate it. Each experiments with and constructs particular narrative frameworks (e.g. Webb’s ghazals/anti ghazals and Findley’s several narrators in *The Wars*) to confront and encapsulate the irrepresible world in which they live.

Pauline Butling suggests, in "Paradox and Play in the Poetry of Phyllis Webb," that Webb establishes in her poetry a "field of play" through which she initiates and sustains a fluid and variable I.eye. This I.eye forms and reforms in light of the particular perspective and context in which Webb finds herself (191-192). Therefore, within the boundaries that Webb creates for herself -- the uncluttered space of the *Naked Poems* and the personal, political and social confinements of and commitments to figures and forms in *Wilson’s Bowl* and *Water and Light* -- she "tries to write a poem" (Webb, "Some final questions," *Naked Poems*) about the creative process and individuation. Her attempt is accompanied by the understanding that these things exist in a continuum.
Findley, through his manipulation of time and space, fictional levels, voice (i.e. narration) and character, maintains a similar field of play. Using a grand narrative canvas, he also attempts to create "fictions" about artistic expression and the will of the individual. The Wars shows how global conflict, in this instance World War I, intersects with and invades the relationships between ordinary people and the plans and events in their lives (York, Front Lines 32). Famous Last Words spans thirty-five years, three continents and various levels of reality. Not Wanted On The Voyage illustrates a break with tradition, storytelling and truth as the protagonist knows it. At the end of each novel s/he (Robert Ross, Quinn, Mrs. Noyes) is left, asking the equivalent of "Had all the truths been told? Had everything been said?" (Findley, FLW 385). For Findley, the truth awaits those who defy the ephemeral nature of the postmodern world.

In their later works, Webb and Findley continue to confront a context of paradoxical beginnings and endings, contradictory intentions and actions, and a confounding interplay of inspirational voices and meanings. Through their unique "field[s] of play," however, they discover that in exposing themselves to the apocalyptic nature of life and art, they find the ever-evolving wonder of its beauty. They come to know that stasis is death and motion is affirmation:
Listen. If I have known beauty
let's say I came to it
asking (Webb, "Some final questions," Naked Poems)

The study develops some meaningful coincidences and
intriguing parallels within the bodies of Webb and Findley's
works that are completely accidental but never entirely
random. As Findley has articulated, there is a sense of
coincidence present between his fictions and Webb's poetry.
He says that artists pass through the same territory at
different speeds and so, with regard to Webb and himself,
they are "kindred spirits" (Findley, Interview).2 Findley's
and Webb's acknowledged relationship with each other's work
gives credence to the fortuitous associations of theme and
structure found therein. As Findley and Webb's creative
voices echo and re-echo, they produce a polyphonal treatment
of the pain and resiliency of human experience.

Notes

1. It is acknowledged by the writer that Findley and Webb met in 1965.
   They were both employees for the CBC (she the producer for the program
   Ideas). My thanks to John Huicoop and Phyllis Webb for this
   clarification (Letters).

2. Webb, in a letter to the writer, also intimates that she and Findley
   share a similar mindset. She states that "Gate Crashing," in Hanging
   Fire is a poem about "Tiff" and the "connection" they have with regard
to animal suffering (experimentation).
CHAPTER ONE

There is room. (Webb, "Suite I," Naked Poems)

After their early struggles, both with subject matter and technique, Webb and Findley each forge ahead thematically and stylistically. The characters/speakers of the later works still contend with an imperfect world. They grapple with feelings of loneliness, longing, betrayal, guilt and regret, but manage to endure. Webb and Findley, moreover, begin to afford their creations greater freedom of expression through an experimental use of form (Webb) and innovative narrative strategies (Findley). In effect they create space for the process of interpreting life through art, both for themselves and their readers. Both artists make their first steps in 1969 (Webb) and 1977 (Findley), respectively, toward clarity of expression resulting in moments of illumination amidst the dark forces of existence:

"Touch these pages and you have me in your fingertips. We survive in one another. Everything lives forever. Believe it. Nothing dies" (Findley, The Wars 135). Poet and novelist go through the same general process to reach such illumination. They, of course, make individual aesthetic choices to articulate their vision.

Webb's first movement towards a less obtrusive authorial presence hovering in and around her art is evident
in the form she employs in the Naked Poems. As Susan Rudy Dorscht states, in the article "poems dressed in a dress and naked: sweet lines from phyllis," the poems are "formally naked, stripped of long lines, of full pages, of complex metaphors" (55), more fully revealing the poet who is no longer detached from her material. Although still preoccupied with the themes of nature (both elemental and human) and art, Webb experiences their rapture in what, six years later, she describes as a distinct and lyrical "modal possibility": "Did the eagle descend for a moment in the form of a hummingbird? In any case, the air was very clear; sound came through as very plain song" (Webb, How Do I Love Thee 70). Webb (albeit cryptically) celebrates her ability to articulate her grand poetic vision (the eagle) with weightless simplicity (the hummingbird).

The poems, beginning with the intensity of a love relationship and ending with "Some Final Questions", are to be read as a suite. John Hulcoop states that "Non Linear", flanked on the one side by "Suites 1 and 2" and "Suite of Lies" and by "Some Final Questions" on the other, serves as the still and lyric point in Webb’s turning narrative world ("Phyllis Webb and the Priestess of Motion" 31). Webb’s consternation about the tension between the contradictory nature of experience and form achieves a peaceful balance as the poet with her I/eye precisely sees her subject matter:
a curve/broken
of green
moss weed
kelp shells pebbles
lost orange rind
orange crab    pale
delicates at peace
on this sand
tracery of last night's
tide ("Non Linear")

All five sections of the suite, however, confront the formal boundaries -- voice, line, syntax, rhythm, rhyme and cadence -- of a lyrical poem. Each section confronts issues of mutability, and the ensemble effect is a cumulative portrayal of a world in flux. As John Hulcoop suggests, Webb, as the "Priestess of Motion," sees that nothing known (love, loss, observations of objects in the natural world) can be called finally final (Hulcoop, "Phyllis Webb" 31).

Webb, now acknowledging that what exists is perpetually in process, articulates her understanding of this fact through the use of a shifting narrative voice and a circular organizational pattern. The focus of the poems moves from an intensely personal perspective to a wider plain, the island landscape, then intellectually outward to contemplate the expanse of time and finally back to the personal. This circular motion is similar to that used by Timothy Findley in The Wars. The novel begins with an image of a man, a horse and a dog and, after tumultuous events, both private and public, and much interpretation and reassessment of them, the story returns to the original frame, man, horse
and dog. Findley also employs a shifting narrative voice similar to the use of the device by Webb in the *Naked Poems*. Webb’s shift is one of polyphonic reverberation (sound and echo):

The sun comes through plum curtains.

I said
the sun is gold

in your eyes

It isn’t the sun you said ("Suite 2").

Findley’s narrative shifts from the omniscient third person to the participating "you", to diary excerpts and tapes of two of the characters (Lady Juliet d’Orsey and Marian Turner). For both writers there is no single voice of narrative authority. By not limiting themselves to a linear sequence of thought and event, they are each able to express a greater latitude of human interplay. Webb and Findley are thus afforded a range of interpretation which is rich in texture, comprehensive in its clarity.

"Suite 1" and "Suite 2" detail Webb’s spiritual and physical awakening in an intense love relationship which causes language to be stripped bare:

Poems naked

in the sunlight

on the floor ("Suite 2").

The presentation of the poems in "Suite 2" in italics
emphasizes the poet’s heightened sensitivity as a result of the connections with the lover in "Suite 1." As she moves to contemplate the world beyond her room, Webb grounds herself by the use of regular typeface. She returns to the italic mode in the brief section on family and falsehood, "Suite of Lies." In "Some final questions" Webb is able to balance her composition because she has achieved a certain symbiosis of emotions (ideal) and externals (real). The two come together in antiphonal lines, italic/plainscript.

In "Suite 1" attention is drawn to the body of the language both figuratively and literally. She welcomes the visitor into her home, life and body:

MOVING
to establish distance
between our houses.

It seems I welcome you in.

Your mouth blesses me all over.

There is room ("Suite 1").

As a result of the shock of contact of house to house and body to body, Webb questions her sense of individuality by observing the details of her room:

YOUR BLOUSE

I people
this room
with things, a
chair, a lamp, a
fly, two books by
Marianne Moore.
I have thrown my
blouse on the floor.
Was it only
last night? ("Suite 1")
The space between the objects in the room and the words on
the page illustrates how Webb attempts to bridge the expanse
of the objective and the subjective worlds. She strives for
order as opposed to the disorder of the love encounter. She
explores the possibilities of meaning, sound, and light that
develop from the physicality of the relationship. She hears
two flies "making love quietly" on the ceiling. She is in
awe of the touch of her lover. She alludes to the darkness
of herself and her poetry:

YOU
took

with so much
gentleness

my dark ("Suite 1")

Webb's reflection upon the sensual aspect of her love
continues in "Suite 2." She ponders the beauty of the
relationship in its hues of gold and plum. She feels the
pangs of a lover as she watches her partner dress "in the
gold darkening light." The play of darkness and light in
this particular section accentuates the confusion of her
emotions. This confusion culminates, however, in a freer
sense of self: "You brought me clarity." Webb realizes
that inherent in the love relationship are both pain and
pleasure. She embraces the essential paradox that an act of
loving precedes one of leaving and thus highlights (at least
for this poem sequence) the need for multiple movements
outwards and inwards.

Findley, in *The Wars*, is also concerned with paradox.
In order to cherish and preserve the lives of the vulnerable
(horse, dog, rabbit, Rowena), Robert himself, by the novel’s
end, must act with the same violence which he abhors.
Findley, like Webb, uses images of darkness and light in
portraying the duality of experience which, as Diana Brydon
suggests, seems "both to appal and fascinate" ("A Devotion
to Fragility" 83).

"Non Linear" details Webb’s movement outward to the
natural world and her fragile presence in it. Many of the
eleven poems in this section recount the facts of her daily
life. She lives near the ocean. She takes long walks along
the beach, listening to the wash of the waves, observing the
remnants of the tides and the actions of her neighbours.
Her house is filled with flowers, "narcissus," "daffodils,"
"chrysanthemums," and art, "the white [Takao] Tanabe," and
"[Irving] Layton’s Love." All of these things are described
in imagist terms or in abstractions of white and black.
Webb looks at things as if she wants to paint them and does
so in words.

As in her earlier work, Webb tries to keep chaos at bay
by naming what is concrete in her milieu. This ordering
technique is reminiscent of one used by Findley in *The Wars*.
The trials of war weigh heavily upon Robert Ross and his
fellow soldiers. They live in what the third person narrator calls the Stained Glass dugout. Each man has his named object within it. Rodwell has his creatures, "'Birds. Rabbits. Hedgehogs. Toads and things...'}" (The Wars 88); Devlin, his panels of stained glass; Bonnycastle, his peaches; Levitt, Clausewitz on War; and Robert, a picture of his sister, Rowena. These items provide each of them with focal points so that they do not totally lose their sanity. As Lorraine York suggests, in Introducing Timothy Findley's "The Wars," Robert and the other men in the Stained Glass dugout each stand for certain ideas and approaches to the experience of war (70). However, just as the structure which the men have created in the Stained Glass dugout is vulnerable and is ultimately destroyed, Webb's island sanctuary is ephemeral and is absorbed by images of death and apocalyptic pronouncement.

She compares the trials of her love relationship to "Job's moaning" and "the sigh of Sisyphus." Thoughts of her lover's absence overwhelm her. She is torn between the force of erotic passion (Eros) and her need for an unselfish reasoned love (Agape). Her utterings reach a cacophonous roar, an inescapable sound and fury:

I hear the waves hounding the window: lord, they are the root waves of the poem's meter the waves of the root poem's sex.
The waves of Event
(the major planets, the minor
planets, the Act)
brake down at my window:
I also hear those waves ("Non Linear").

Webb's individuality dissolves in the warmth of the lover's
embrace (the Act), in the observations of her personal space
(the island surroundings), and in the abyss of poetic meter
and the tide of time.

This loss of a definitive self is encapsulated in the
"new alphabet" of "Suite of Lies." Everything breaks down
in the face of falsehood:

\begin{verbatim}
brother and sister
those children

the way of what fell
the lies
like the petals
falling drop
delicately ("Suite of Lies")
\end{verbatim}

Family bonds dissolve in a simile of haiku-like simplicity.
Sentences break into fragments where no distinction is made
between subject and object. Traditional familial and
linguistic structures are knocked off their pedestals to
become merely elements in the interplay of the poem and life
(Butling 204). Webb's personal space and the large
universal cycles fuse in her "final questions."

Having acknowledged that she cannot order experience,
Webb is ready to reveal herself. She responds, sometimes
playfully, sometimes laconically (Woodcock, "'In the
beginning'" 262), but with an underlying artistic integrity,
to a series of questions:
What do you really want? want the apple on the bough in the hand in the mouth seed planted in the brain want to think "apple" ("Some final questions")

Webb wants to grasp everything within her realm of experience both physically and intellectually (not to mention spiritually). She desires beautiful objects, meaningful human relationships and comprehension of Source and End. However, her responses become more flippant as the questions asked impinge on her creative time. Finally she relents and proffers her paradoxical poetic credo.

The world formalized in the Naked Poems can only respond to questions "about process and individuation. Or absolutes whole numbers that sort of thing?" with a "Yeah" or "Oh?" ("Some final questions"). John Hulcoop affirms that the final question in Naked Poems, although ironic, is equally positive because it implies another answer (as yet unspoken). From this answer the perpetual question regarding the contrary nature of life and art will "rerise in desire" for yet another answer ("Phyllis Webb" 32-33). Webb closes the Naked Poems, leaving the reader with the poem's terminal punctuation, a question mark, and with the space on the page. The ever-flowing relationships and events depicted in the Naked Poems cannot be bound by traditional poetic closure. The experience and interpretation of such a world, for both poet and reader, is still in process.
In Findley’s _The Wars_, the reader immediately faces the figure of Robert Ross:

Twenty feet away, Robert sat on his haunches watching them [horse and dog]. His pistol hung down from his fingers between his knees. He still wore his uniform with its torn lapels and burned sleeves. In the firelight, his eyes were very bright. His lips were slightly parted. He could not breathe through his nose. It was broken. His face and the backs of his hands were streaked with clay and sweat. His hair hung down across his forehead. He was absolutely still (9).

Findley presents the character as inherently distant and mysterious. The way to come to an understanding of him is to commit to the five-part structure (akin to Webb’s _Naked Poems_) of _The Wars_. Each part contributes to the whole but within the individual sections there are various disparate elements -- subplots, narrative modes (documentary vis à vis fictive), narrational levels. All become brushstrokes in the portrait of Robert at the end of the novel -- a man tortured by familial obligation and by war but still alive. As Simone Vauthier suggests, in "The Dubious Battle of Storytelling: Narrative Strategies in Timothy Findley’s _The Wars_," Findley creates a textual space in which the levels of narrative converge and commingle and eventually share in the truth of Robert’s fiery final gesture, the release of the horses (29). Just as Webb spirals toward her revelations in the _Naked Poems_, Findley circles closer and closer to the essence of Robert Ross, delineating his
personal relationships, his loss of a definitive self and his attempts to order experience.

In Part One, Findley gives "you" (the reader) images of Robert in a series of tableaux. He poses with his family "beside a new Ford Truck" (13). He waits on a station platform for a taxi. He stands erect as "Robert Raymond Ross - Second Lieutenant, C.F.A." (49). He leaps in flames from the page, a figure in the mind of Findley's historian (13). However, just as Webb in the Naked Poems feels compelled to move beyond her room into the island landscape, Findley removes Robert from the "5 x 9" shots and exposes him to the external world. His intent is to show how a sensitive individual such as Robert first reacts and then acts in the face of family crisis (the death of his sister, Rowena), sexual awakening and the exigencies of army life. His fragility is similar to Webb's falling petals and his eventual resilience is reminiscent of Webb's questing spirit: "I am trying to write a poem" ("Some final questions").

The first section of The Wars depicts Robert in his roles of son, brother and soldier and introduces his affinity with the natural world. At this early point in Robert's story he is deficient in the familial and soldierly roles, but from the outset he finds freedom in nature: "The sound of the coyote lapping at the water crossed the distance between them and the sound seemed to satisfy his
own thirst" (31). As a victim of the demands of family life, he assumes blame for his sister's death: "It was Robert's fault. Robert was her guardian and he was locked in his bedroom. Making love to his pillows" (21). When ordered by his mother to tend to the killing of Rowena's rabbits, he cannot act. His problems as a soldier include an unfortunate experience in a brothel -- his own premature ejaculation and his witness of a homosexual coupling involving an officer (Taffler) he admires. On his voyage to England, being responsible for the horses, he must shoot one which has broken its leg. He botches the job:

He fired.

A chair fell over in his mind.

He closed his eyes and opened them (65).

Robert the victim is thrust back to the incident of the rabbits when he overheard his parents arguing:

It must be here and he must do it.
'Why?'
'BECAUSE HE LOVED HER.'
A chair fell over (24).

In each traumatic episode where Robert fails, Findley utilizes symbolism -- the chair, bruises, and animals (rabbits, horses) as helpless creatures -- to state and restate Robert's fragility. Findley also reduces language to simple statements to mirror the mental stutter which affects Robert when he is emotionally overwrought. This
device is similar to Webb’s stripping syntax bare in *Naked Poems*. Her experiment in minimalism and his staccato passages are used to good effect. They both capture the essence of overwhelming experience.

Findley further utilizes theatrical/operatic technique to convey the large emotional scale of Robert’s story. In Part One, Findley juxtaposes military and domestic scenes to highlight the conflict Robert faces in the external world and at home. Each scene acts as a "performance piece" (*York, Introducing* 42) further revealing Robert’s tortured thoughts. They build en suite to a deafening crescendo.

In fact, each part of the novel is similarly structured. Part Two details the harsh reality of trench warfare and Juliet d’Orsey’s remembrance of Robert’s friendship with a young man, Harris. The two narratives come together in the literal explosion of the Stained Glass dugout: "In this silence, Rodwell was heard to say to Levitt: ‘Some minuet’" (109). Part Three is pivotal, showing Robert’s development as a military leader. Memories from his childhood serve him well as he takes responsibility for the survival of his men and himself. In Part Four, Juliet D’Orsey reads from her diary, recounting the time Robert spends at her mother’s convalescent home, St. Aubyn. The effects of war on both the military and civilian characters spill from page to page, ending with Juliet quoting her
brother Clive's summation of their involvement in the war: "I doubt we'll ever be forgiven. All I hope is - they'll remember we were human beings" (158). However, Findley adds a coda which moves these observations from a subjective point of view to an offhand objectivity:

So far, you have read of the deaths of 557,017 people - one of whom was killed by a streetcar [Mrs. Ross' brother], one of whom died of bronchitis [Harris] and one of whom died in a barn with her rabbits [Rowena] (158).

In Part Five, Robert returns to the front, where he suffers the ultimate violation, rape by his fellow soldiers. From this climatic point of Robert's dehumanization, the narrative follows him to a final moment of catharsis. There is Robert's grand gesture of freeing the horses, but the story does not end. True to his maturing artistic credo, Findley leaves room for human endurance. In effect, Findley's characters have ridden the waves of the war.

In a manner comparable to Webb (the third section of the Naked Poems), Findley uses the middle section (Part Three) as the still point in the novel's fluctuating universe. Although Robert is in the throes of battle, he maintains a sense of direction. He fixes on concrete objects (ski pole, Lewis gun) and on practical solutions to immediate dangers (overcoming a lack of gas masks). Even amidst the horrors of death and madness, Robert inhabits a landscape where the birds still sing and snow
falls. Moreover, he has not forgotten his reverence for all living creatures:

Early that morning, Robert had released the toad beneath a hedge. Here, there was at least the promise of green. The toad at once had begun to burrow into the welcome mud. It threw the dirt in all directions - making a nest for itself until its eyes were all that could be seen. And the hump of its spotted back. Robert reached down. He touched it with his fingertips. 'Be well,' he said. And left it there (138).

Chaos occurs and recurs in the sections that follow, but small symbols of hope point the way to Findley's concluding note of affirmation: "'Look! you can see our breath!' And you can" (191).

The force of Robert's struggle for individuality is enhanced by the narrative contributions of Marian Turner (Robert's nurse) and Lady Juliet d'Orsey. Findley's polyphonics are more complex than Webb's. The poet's extra voices, lover and questioner, are used to bolster her stance as the definer of truth and the fluctuating universe. The novelist, however, offers Marian and Juliet's perceptions not only to authenticate Robert's plight but also to broaden conventional interpretations of war and manhood. With reference to Robert, Marian defines a "hero":

My opinion was - he was a hero. Not your everyday Sergeant York or Billy Bishop, mind you! (LAUGHTER) But a hero nonetheless. You see, he did the thing that no one else would even dare to think of doing. And that to me's as good a definition of a 'hero' as you'll get. Even when the thing that's done is something of which you disapprove (16).
It is Marian who tends Robert when he is a broken man physically. She offers him death and he responds, "'Not yet'" (189). Robert's bravery is the stimulus which allows Marian to articulate her thoughts about the ambiguities of war and language and life itself.

Juliet is a child when she meets Robert. She watches him and writes down her very astute observations in a diary. Unlike her older sister, Barbara, who briefly beds him, Juliet loves Robert unconditionally. She remains by his side until his death and takes responsibility for his burial. Inscribed on Robert's grave marker is Juliet's tribute to the man she knew:

EARTH AND AIR AND FIRE AND WATER
ROBERT R. ROSS
1896  1922 (190)

Juliet's testimony and Marian's insight combine to give space to aspects of Robert story which, left untold, would relegate him to the status of traitor. Moreover, Findley brings individuals who traditionally would have served in supporting roles into positions of prominence. As Lorraine York suggests, Marian and Juliet become creators of "a new mythology which runs counter to the old one of war heroes and machismo" (Introducing 84). In effect, Findley, through his choice of narrators, eschews methods of storytelling that value death over life.

Part Five of The Wars as it delineates Robert's acts of defiance has a cadence similar to the final questions in
Webb's *Naked Poems*. Robert's vulnerability, upon his return to the front, is palpable: "He drew his knees up. He felt - all at once - appallingly alone" (163). It parallels Webb's panic:

> doubled up I feel  
> small like these poems  
> the area of attack  
> is diminished ("Some final questions")

As well as such strikingly similar images, Findley and Webb use pared-down language again to denote emotional upheaval. After he is raped, Robert tears apart his room, searching frantically: "Gun. Gun. He wanted his gun" (170). Webb's questioner asks simply, "What are you sad about?" ("Some final questions"). Both novelist and poet know, however, that nothing is ever simple, and they mourn the flawed course of human events. Each yearns for "the impossibly beautiful" ("Some final questions") and yet each is content, at the very least, to find room for acts of charity. Findley's Robert has cherished the photograph of his beloved, hydrocephalic sister, Rowena, as a memento of purity and innocence. He can no longer allow it to exist in a corrupt world: "Robert burned it [the picture of Rowena] in the middle of the floor" (172). Webb experiences the pain and sadness of a lost love:

> Then you must go.  
> I sat cross-legged  
> on the bed.  
> There is no room  
> for self pity  
> I said  

> I lied ("Suite II")
However, she is determined, despite her loss, to continue to create: "I am trying to write a poem" ("Some final questions").

Findley, in The Wars, is more vigorous in the quest for beauty and charity than is Webb. Whereas Webb tends toward flippancy in attempting to handle chaos, Findley is relentless in bearing Robert through the fires of war and beyond to a measure of peace. After the rape, Robert, in shock, wanders through the war-torn landscape of France. Explosions erupt around him. Eventually, he returns to the front, and he defies a superior (Captain Leather) in order to save a large group of horses. In a desperate moment, Robert shoots Captain Leather. Betrayed by men, his empathy now lies simply with the natural world. He moves to save yet more horses and, in this attempt, he and his mount, engulfed in flames, burst forth like an amalgam of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse (Revelation 6:i-viii). Although physically maimed, Robert survives, and he lives as a testament to human endurance in the face of private and public wars:

There is a photograph of Robert and Juliet taken about a year before his death. He wears a close-fitting cap rather like a toque - pulled down over his ears. He has no eyebrows - his nose is disfigured and bent and his face is a mass of scar tissue. Juliet is looking up at him - speaking - and Robert is looking directly at the camera. He is holding Juliet's hand. And he is smiling (190).

Findley ends his novel with a smile and a visible breath.
Webb, in the *Naked Poems*, is not yet ready to be quite as generous.

With respect to *Naked Poems* and *The Wars*, both writers achieve their individual interpretative goals. They are better able to handle the subject of mutability which has bedevilled them. The struggle, however, is not over. Findley tackles another momentous era in history, 1936-1945 (*Famous Last Words*). Webb falls poetically silent for thirteen years. She returns full force with the publication of *Wilson's Bowl*. Both fill their pages with images and events of private and public lives rife with disparate and colourful patterns and meanings. They both take up a questioning stance with fervour, moving out to the broader sphere of politics and power and the place of the individual within them.
CHAPTER TWO

We who have dreamt our demons into stone
caught at our groins, screamed and fell at the
crossing,
find mercy and loving-beholding illumination

As in their earlier works, similar thematic issues can
be discerned in Phyllis Webb’s Wilson’s Bowl and Timothy
Findley’s Famous Last Words. They both struggle, then come
to terms with manifestations of the philosophical problem of
evil. For Webb, the poet, the struggle is as public as
addressing the horrors of torture assaulting humankind’s
sensibility and as private as reconciling the suicide of a
close friend with her own affirmation of life. Findley, the
novelist, details on his broader canvas a panoply of events
that explode in history and implode in the individual
psyches of his characters. Stylistically, however, they
employ different structural modes. Webb uses formal verse
and line patterns in her attempt to contain the chaotic
nature of her subject matter. Findley, yet again, utilizes
a multi-layered narrative to represent the texture and depth
of the individual’s interpretation of experience. The
result for both writers, after "great wrenching and trauma,"
is a work of survival (Findley, Interview).

In Wilson’s Bowl, Webb again faces the paradox of chaos
and order which she feels pervades human experience. As in
the *Naked Poems*, she first sets the tone for the collection. The poet, isolated in her island world, tacks together various pieces of material, resulting in a garment that she presents to the outside world:

I cut out diamonds from a pattern piece by piece. I sew two pieces, one purple one red, together, attach another making designs as I go. Mapping it into some kind of crazy poncho. I am absorbed in the fitting together of pieces. Troika the white cat watches ("Poems of Failure" 18).

This "poncho" (the poems) is made up of Webb's passion for a past of revolutionaries (Peter Kropotkin), poets (Pound, Rilke), philosophers (Socrates) and painters (Vasarely), and contemporary political issues ("Treblinka Gas Chamber") and the bonds of friendship (Lilo Berliner). Webb, once more, opens her I/eye and attempts to come to terms with the "Portraits", "Crimes", "Artifacts" and "Dreams" which are the "Common Good" of her being (these being her subtitles for groups of poems). This probing examination of the various influences in Webb's personal and public lives culminates in a "synchronous poem" (the whole book) of "first and last things" (Mandel, 64). The whole collection, therefore, stands as a continuum of her struggle to piece together elements of power and powerlessness and come to a measure of resolution.

Findley, in *Famous Last Words*, similarly addresses the enigmas of the human struggle, but the form of the novel
affords him the space to work with a larger cast of characters and a broader span of events. The narrative structure of *Famous Last Words* is multi-layered like that of *The Wars*. The novel begins in 1910 with the main character Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, age twelve, watching his father leap to his death from "the roof of the Arlington Hotel in Boston"(*FLW* 1). From this point the novel "leaps" with the same purpose as Mauberley Sr. to March, 1945, and it focuses on Hugh Selwyn Mauberley's escape from the stranglehold of fascist Europe. Two months later Mauberley is dead, and the story proceeds on two levels - Mauberley's own story on the walls of the Elysium Hotel and its interpretation by Lieutenant Quinn.

Throughout the text, Findley scatters signposts which point to his continuing concern with the individual's ordering of experience. Of these signposts Hugh's epigraph looms the largest: "All I have written here is true; except the lies"(*FLW* 59). Findley believes that each reader comes to understand human motivation by piecing together disparate narrative elements, and he suggests that the answer lies not in the "given" (i.e. not in a single interpretation) but in "forgiveness"(Findley, Interview). Mauberley's truth/lies reveal that, while his wrongs cannot be forgotten, they can be interpreted as part of the fabric of human fallibility. Findley fashions an intricate pattern of
relationships among historical (Wallis Simpson, Canadian-born Harry Oakes) and fictional figures (Isabella Loverso). Like Webb, he arrives at his own resolution of the chaotic.

In Wilson's Bowl and Famous Last Words, Webb and Findley respectively have a fascination with anarchy and fascism as systems of control. In their treatment of the ideologies, both deal with historical people whom they "invent" or rather, re-invent. They take fact and incorporate it into the fiction they weave about the characters. Webb, in a series of poems, "Poems of Failure", details the life of Russian anarchist, Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921), and her relationship with his ideology. Findley, in giving breath to Ezra Pound's poetic creation Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, explores the process by which fascism consumes the mind and actions of an individual. In each instance, however, poet and novelist exorcise a demon ideology, realizing its inherent nihilism.

Webb and Findley acknowledge that anarchy and fascism are mere "patches" of the larger design of the human fabric. Webb, in commenting about the process of writing the never completed "Kropotkin Poems", asserts:

Too grand and too designed (the 'body politic' and 'love's body' as interchangeable polymorphous analogues in an ideal world), they were perhaps too big and too weak for me. The infantile ego could not solicit that beautiful anarchist dream
poem. Violence, density, indifference did not presume to speak. Neither the Muse of History nor the Muse of Poetry nor the 'towering dead' could move me through that work ("Foreword," Wilson's Bowl i).

Webb labels the Kropotkin poems "failures", and she moves beyond their subject as source of inspiration. She passes through creative paralysis to the consideration of other worthy figures and ideologies. Findley's character, Mauberley, also passes through an identity crisis with respect to his ideological leanings. Mauberley's ambition "to describe the beautiful" (FLW 5) leads him to associate with an insidious crowd. He becomes embroiled in a number of intrigues to his detriment and that of his close friends. Mauberley's writings on the wall of the Elysium are parallel to Webb's confession about the insufficiencies of revolutionary ideals. A comparable trail toward the eventual rejection of a specific ideology can be traced in Webb's "Poems of Failure" and Findley's novel.

Webb begins with "A picture of sweet old Prince/Kropotkin on the wall" ("Poem of Failure I" 13) and assesses his life trials and achievements in succeeding poems. She touches on his continental travels, his imprisonment and his personal relationships. She rhapsodizes on the sound of his name, his "incredible fire, irresistible grace" ("Poem of Failure II" 15) and compares his actions the infamous American anarchists, Sacco and Vanzetti. In "Poem of Failure III" she establishes a
psychic connection with Kropotkin and the lines flow between his pacing in a prison cell and her "walk[ing] up and down the room which looks out/on islands and strait"(17). Webb, however, cuts the poem short. She feels that her "'good masterpiece of work'" does not capture the anarchist spirit.

In "Poems of Failure" IV and V Webb presents her reservations about her subject matter. She begins to acknowledge her personal landscape:

I drive spitting dust with a map of the U.S.S.R. in my head. Too big for my head. Too big to remember how many independent republics, airline routes, rivers, mountain ranges, lakes and all named places. I speed on covering the highspots up to the north end back to my southeast Beaver Point ("Poem of Failure V" 19).

Russia and its immense expanse then invade her subconscious. She dreams that her cat, Troika, has been killed and seeks solace from her nightmares in the natural world. Webb then returns to her original frame, Kropotkin, and reassesses his place in her life and art. He intrudes on her Salt Spring Island present: "The simple profundity of a deadman works/at my style. I am impoverished. He the White Christ./Not a case of identification. Easier to see myself in the white cat asleep on the bed"("Poem of Failure VII" 21). Webb is willing to give Kropotkin his due, but she is ready to move beyond what she now perceives as his limited notions of anarchy: "I scribble. I approach some distant dream./I wait for moonlight reflecting on the night sea. I
can/wait. We shall see"("Poem of Failure VII" 21).

Findley's rejection of a specific ideology is more sharply detailed and severe than Webb's. Famous Last Words, like "Poems of Failure", begins with an image of a man:

Twenty-six years before, in 1919, when the other war was over, Mauberley had come to Europe...a boy with a sheaf of poems in his hand (FLW 4).

Mauberley -- aesthete, member of the "lost generation" of America, exile -- comes to Europe in search of beauty and a place of belonging. His travels take him from London, England to Venice, Italy, to the far reaches of Shanghai, China. At each juncture, Mauberley meets individuals whom he believes will satiate his need for order. He becomes a protégé of fellow expatriate Ezra Pound. He befriends two women of infinite dignity and grace, Wallis Simpson (the Duchess of Windsor) and Isabella Loverso. He helps to organize a cabal, its members plotting an elaborate scheme to secure world domination. Mauberley is drawn to these charismatic people because they stimulate his imagination and give him a sense of wholeness which he otherwise lacks. Findley captures Mauberley's impressionable nature in the scene where Mauberley observes a young Blackshirt:

On the other side of the room, the Blackshirts made a great show of their presence, laughing a good deal, making much of their African victory,...

At one point one of them stood up--very tall--not more than twenty-two years old and wearing boots and a wide brown belt. I could hear him excusing himself and I knew this young exuberant man would have to pass my table. And I began to perspire. I wanted so desperately to follow him,...
And yet I turned in my chair and watched that young man going away. And I went away with him--in my mind. And knelt before his strength. And his victory (FLW 91).

Mauberley's fascination with fascism (as a form of power) is weighted with the homoerotic. His self-conflict is thus compounded and his eventual disillusion with those he emulates culminates in his violent death.

As Mauberley is caught up in scandal and political corruption, he views his friends being destroyed by the force of fascism. Isabella Loverso is undone by her split loyalty. She is a fascist, but she is also faithful to the memory of her free thinking husband who, along with their children, died on the order of Benito Mussolini. She cannot forget this atrocity, and so she betrays the cabal, informing the English of its plot to kidnap the Windsors. She is subsequently killed by one of the cabal's members. Mauberley learns of her fate and mourns both the death of a friend and a doomed cause:

I looked at the food and drink in my hands; von Ribbentrop's back; the sunlight and the windows. Five hundred human beings all adorned with roses were standing right beside us, and it couldn't have mattered less. There could have been a million, and the little chairs, like gilded bones, would still be piled around us all. Empty cages waiting to be filled (FLW 264).

Wallis Simpson is driven by an egomaniacal need: "I only want one thing. I only want my life" (FLW 75). Denied her chance to be queen, she is offered a prominent position in the cabal. After a series of intrigues and botched
attempts to rise to power, she and her husband are seen
"cast adrift" in the sea:

They were drifting. Waiting. Listening. Six little dogs were lying at their feet. Wallis shaded her eyes and scanned the whole horizon. Nothing— but the Island [Bahamas].
Wallis sighed.
It was over. She looked at the Duke and her mouth twisted down. Whatever they were—here and now—the two of them—was exactly what they would be forever. She looked away towards one side and then the other, counting her pieces of luggage. Twenty-six (FLW 383).

The most telling indictment of the flawed ideology is Mauberley’s destruction at the hands of Harry Reinhardt, an executioner for the cabal. Mauberley, deeply involved with the cabal, has to order the killing of Sir Harry Oakes:

"What can I do for you?"
Turning towards him, I tried as hard as I could to look into his face and not to falter...
"I need a death," I said.
A little smile appeared at the corner of his [Harry Reinhardt’s] lips.
"All right," he said. "Just tell me where and when and who..."
It was done. My fall was over. All the way down (FLW 374-375).

In ordering the obliteration of another man, Mauberley has taken fascism to its logical end, and as a result seals his own fate. The extreme nature of his choice is shown in his next meeting with the assassin:

"Harry?" I said. "Where is he [Harry Oakes]?"
"Everything’s taken care of."

... He reached up then and pressed my face into his bloody palm. "That’s right," he said. "You lick it clean." And he pressed again—so hard this time that my lips were forced apart and I began to lick because I had no choice (FLW 378).
Mauberley flees and Harry Reinhardt tracks him down and kills him, but not before Mauberley has etched his testament into the Elysium Hotel walls. His writings, though damning of himself and his friends, nevertheless reveal his willingness to accept responsibility for politics gone exceedingly awry. In epilogue Mauberley inscribes a warning to those who ignore the ever-present shadow of fascism:

Thus, whatever rose towards the light is left to sink unnamed: a shape that passes slowly through a dream. Waking, all we remember is the awesome presence, while a shadow lying dormant in the twilight whispers from the other side of reason; I am here. I wait (FLW 396).

Findley, through the character of Mauberley, articulates the need for vigilance against an ideology the essence of which is chaos and destruction. *Famous Last Words*, therefore, ends with an invocation to watchfulness which is more ominous than the resigned waiting of Webb's "Poems of Failure". Findley, the novelist, has the scope to explore the many facets of fascism whereas Webb, the poet, realizes that the subject of anarchy cannot be contained within a set of poems. She lays it and Peter Kropotkin aside and moves on to the study of figures who have attempted to interpret the travails of life.

Webb's "portraits" bear comparison with Findley's development of the characters surrounding Hugh Selwyn Mauberley. Both poet and novelist delineate various traits of historical personages whose actions are seen as absurd or
weak or even vile, and in the delineation they evoke a sense of ridicule, a flicker of sympathy and, at times, much loathing. The characters, despite their individual struggles, succumb to the pressure of the tumult of their lives.

In her depiction of Socrates Webb illustrates how a philosopher, "old master", whose lifework was once worthy of her attention, can be rendered powerless in her lines, "old man/under the blanket/in his cell" ("Socrates" 26-27). Webb begins the poem by placing herself, "I ignoramus", in opposition to "Scientia/immaculata", but her initial self-deprecation is shown to be ironic. She plays with his philosophical teachings, measuring Socrates by images of darkness and light, and ultimately exposes the absurdity of his chosen end. Surrounded by his entourage, he drinks a "cup of hemlock":

What a dumb play  
for one who knew  
all the answers (WB 27)

Webb sees Socrates’ death not as a valiant struggle against his unenlightened detractors but as a failure to affirm the value of life: "'For is not philosophy/the study of death?'"(27). In the following poem, "Kropotkin", she sees a similar shrivelling of purpose:

K. on his deathbed  
a pine frond arranged  
into the photographer’s
lustrous design
and lace and a white
pillow for bedding death
for a still life (NB 28)

Webb sees this artificial display as representative of
Kropotkin's ineffectual posturing in the grand scheme of
living. In each poem Webb finds a revolutionary thinker
wanting.

Findley shows his awareness of the flaws in human
performance through the fictional character of Lorenzo de
Broca, a "young Italian poet" (FLW 288). Lorenzo, in his
plane Icarus, carries his idealism to a fiery end. Not
content with being prophet and writing in the sky the words
of Daniel -- mene mene tekel upharsin -- Lorenzo wants also
to be judge and executioner: "DEATH TO FASCISTS EVERYWHERE"
(FLW 288). He releases a tank of gasoline over the
Windsors’ party on Nassau. It explodes on impact and fifty-
five lives are lost in the ensuing conflagration. Findley’s
omniscient narrator in coda tells of Lorenzo’s fate:

The aeroplane the Duchess of Windsor had watched
being loaded aboard the Excalibur in the Azores
had joined the other skeletons of war machines
and ships beneath the waves; while the whimsical
currents had deposited its drowned young pilot--
who called himself Icarus--on the coral close
to a colony of birds whose wings he would have
envied, but whose beaks and claws had no respect
for mythology--except insofar as they fed on it
(FLW 288-289).

Human effort, whether ideal or anarchical, is ultimately
subject to the tides of time and the vagaries of existence.
Findley, in the portrayal of Lorenzo, is more sympathetic to the absurd nature of human action than is Webb. He seems to be more willing to acknowledge that appropriate control, more often than not, may be elusive.

While Findley is generally more charitable in his interpretation of extreme behaviour, Webb is able to regard certain individuals in a softer light. In her treatment of the poet Rilke she affords herself lines of tenderness as she relates to his lyrical despair. She provides a sketch of his poetical devotions and those devoted to him. She recognizes, however, a "hardness" in him, in that he distanced himself from others: "But you had to leave/everyone once, once at least"("Rilke" 32). With an hypnotic echo device ("roses, the roses"), Webb superimposes herself on the image of Rilke. His existential despair becomes her own and she ends the poem in hollow sound: "Echoes. The echoes./I don't know why I'm here"(32).

She again picks up this thread of despair in her poem "Vasarely". She is first attracted to his geometric art as it appears on postcards. The structure of the poem imitates the artist's evolving style which culminates (in the 1950s and 60s) in optical illusions suggesting movement (Encyclopaedia Britannica X 363). She soon becomes distrustful of his perpetual shapeshifting and shifts her own "gaze from the abode of adoration"(WR 34). She
describes his "dicing for multiples of eleven" and his
"horrendous hexograms"(35). Even the sounds of the words
are harsh, and they are reinforced by Webb's reference to
Vasarely's maniacal laughter and his rude gestures. Unlike
her "psychic", empathetic relationship to Rilke, Webb's
connection to Vasarely is antagonistic. She is upset that
she cannot find his fixed point of reference, his identity,
in his works. However, she imagines "only yesterday I
thought I saw/him painting himself into a corner"(35). In
this respect she feels that Vasarely has a difficulty,
similar to her own, imposing form on the chaotic. Despite
the assurance that behind the changes Vasarely can assert,
"C'est toujours moi", Webb remains "si triste"(35).

A similar sense of sadness emanates from Findley's
portrayal of the Duke of Windsor. Stripped of his crown,
the Duke wanders aimlessly through Findley's pages. The
pathos of his character is revealed in an extended
real/surreal scene replete with images reminiscent of Webb's
"Vasarely." Findley manipulates the episode so that the
"real" course of events (i.e. the Duke in the Martello
tower, the mirrors, the attempt to kidnap him) is overlaid
with a surreal dream sequence. In his dream the Duke faces
his own optical illusions as he sits before a triptych of
mirrors. Each mirror reflects a different representation of
himself -- Prince of Wales, "David", and an old man, the
figure of dissipating splendour. Under the influence of Madeira, the Duke engages them in conversation and acknowledges his utter dejection with the turn of his own life. The double narrative layer shatters at the moment the Duke relives his fall into the mirrors and awakens from his dream: "Is it over?" (FLW 252). While he is offered momentary reassurance, he must nevertheless continue his tortured existence. Thus Findley shows a sympathy parallel to Webb's for those who struggle with their despondency over the force of change.

The evocation of loathing for a character who embraces the evils of chaos rounds out Findley and Webb's respective studies of the use and misuse of power. Coincidentally, the figure they both choose to expose as villainous is the "tormented and tormenting" Ezra Pound (Findley, Interview). Webb telescopes Pound's whole life into one poem: "Jew-hater. Poet. Intellectual" ("Ezra Pound" 31). Her focus is a man of paranoid delusions standing in a Pisan jail cell. He weaves in and out of his present reality and his worlds of fantasy, uncertain of what constitutes his crime: "He sees straight/through the bars into the court of Confucius/then slumps in a corner wondering what went wrong" (31). Webb then pictures him as a caged animal, but she concedes that he is "a-typical", for he can read and, most important, write. The paradox of Pound as Webb sees it
is that a man with such savage opinions (fascist sympathizer, anti-semit) can also be a poet of refined thought and technique. As Louis Dudek states, in "Always Phenomenal/Epiphenomenal," she "does not like her subject matter but she can admire the form" (30). Webb compounds the paradox by extending this "mode of doubt" into the fevered mind of her subject. Her conclusion thus is inconclusive. The degree of Pound's implication in the evil of historical events (World War II) is left in question.

Findley's portrayal of Pound is more detailed, but it, too, reveals the savage vein running through Pound's mindset. Pound is antagonistic toward his wife Dorothy who nevertheless faithfully tends to his needs. Often he appears as an opinion-spouting peacock. He is seen unmercifully goading Mauberley. Initially Mauberley admires Pound and considers him a "surrogate father" (FLW 67), but eventually a love-hate relationship develops between the disciple and his mentor:

Dorothy says; "you two fighting again?"
Ezra says; "we two are parting." He clammers onto a table under the window. "Mauberley cannot bear the world of men at arms," he says, "and I cannot bear the world of men in white linen suits" (FLW 82).

The relationship further deteriorates in this scene, and Mauberley turns away from Pound, who is focussed on his aggravation with the neighbour's cat:
"Tomorrow," he says, "Tomorrow I will kill it."
I turned away. That's right, I think. First
you feed it, then you kill it. Like your mind.
And mine. If I let you (FLW 83).

Through Mauberley's troubled relationship with Pound,
Findley illustrates the latter's complex nature. Like Webb,
he sees the paradox in this genius who harbours both
intellectual greatness and loathsome meanness.
However, in Famous Last Words, Findley's main focus is Hugh
Selwyn Mauberley, and he leaves the issue of Pound's
political culpability unresolved.² He simply notes the bald
facts of Pound's end:

Ezra Pound was charged with treason and sent to
prison, although he was ultimately released into a
mental hospital and in the end, was pardoned and
allowed to return to Italy where he died in 1972
(FLW 395).

In Wilson's Bowl and Famous Last Words, Webb and
Findley first examine ideologies and icons, but in each work
there is also a second layer of interpretation. Webb moves
from the first two sections of poems, "Poems of Failure" and
"Portraits," to "read" the personal, social and political
signs of her ongoing experience, "Crimes" and "Artifacts,"
and to present their value for understanding human pain and
anguish. She is then able to express her hopefulness in
signs of regeneration, "Dreams and The Common Good." As
Douglas Barbour comments, in this last section Webb evokes
"her recognition of the season of rebirth and her vision of
another world as far away and as close as our
imagination" ("Canadian Poetry Chronicle XI, Part 2" 45).
For Webb herself "the wonder/is in small change" ("Spring Thing" 83).

Findley, ever alert to interpretative levels, devises a dual reading of Mauberley's pain. He presents a group of American soldiers who find Mauberley's writings on the hotel walls. Each has his own viewpoint on the significance of Mauberley's words. Two of the men dismiss them, but Captain Freyberg and Lieutenant Quinn provide opposing rationales of their worth. Freyberg, obsessed with the abominations seen at the liberated concentration camps, believes that Mauberley and his fellow fascists deserve punishment. However, he asserts that, despite Mauberley's words of witness and apology, the guilty will go free, their evil deeds forgotten. Quinn, familiar with Mauberley's published works, seeks to absolve him of traitorous intent, but, disturbed by what he reads on the walls, has to acknowledge the horrors inherent in Mauberley's fascist allegiances.

Findley, through his depiction of Mauberley's actions and their further interpretation by Freyberg and Quinn, provides richly textured parallels of narration which elucidate the fallible actions of man. While Findley uses different structural techniques than Webb, they share a similar sensibility regarding human striving in the presentation of their material. Both poet and novelist in the end affirm
the spirit of survival.

The keynote poem in the third section of Wilson’s _Bowl_ is "A Question of Questions." Webb, reading a series of political and personal signs, deals with the notions of power and powerlessness in the form of a meditation. Having acknowledged and passed beyond previous mentors in "Portraits", and, having viewed the crimes of humanity ("Solitary Confinement"), Webb, with "question, query, hook, sickle, scythe"(47) in hand, seeks the guidance and comfort of a new "Zen Master"(53). In this poem Webb is the Zen practitioner who attempts to purge herself of the painful intellectual and moral considerations of her reality in favour of an "inner state of spiritual sublimity" (Singh and Sirisena 1).

The poem begins with a series of innocent interrogatives, "why," "how," "where," "when," "who," in which Webb quickly finds horrific and vast replies:

and who are you in this
school
room
torture chamber
whose are you?
and what of your
trials and errors
the judge
in his echo chamber
cannot know
and nor can you
you cannot answer (47)

The lines of this section scissor so as to echo the simplicity and complexity of the interrogative form. They
are short and sharp, splicing from thought to thought. Webb plays with the meaning of words which can be used both as instruments of good and instruments of torture. She illustrates that her incessant questioning results in a game of hide and seek, of concealment and revelation, of division and dominion (Webb, "The Question as an Instrument of Torture," Talking 33). The lack of a period at the end of the section emphasizes this infinity.

The second section shows the deceptive use of the word within the love relationship. Unlike in the Naked Poems, Webb does not unselfishly enter a lover's embrace, but assaults the "succulent lobe of the ear" (48) of her lover with a tongue full of sentence, tricks, mischief and enterprise. This love relationship is sinister. To be deceptive is not conducive to Webb's spirit as she "shut[s] [her] mouth and open[s] her eyes" (48) and demands the honest response of her lover's face. In looking at the "hello" of her lover's mouth the poet is able to sustain a moment which need not be explained through language: "Whatever is rustles existence out of some mouth, stuffs essence into some other" (49). The fairly regular and compact lines of this section and the beginning of the third complement the stillness of the experience.

The moment is broken by the intrusion of "Fancy talk,"
"the wanting of a word/the word," and "busy-bodies' one-way chatter"(49), and again the line lengths scatter in an irregular fashion. The poet is immersed in a nightmare world of peeping Toms, hounds at bay and raiding cops. The simplicity of the lover's smile is lost in parentheses:

(Where did your mouth go?  
why didn't you say hello?)

(49)

Webb has the difficulty of not only explaining the weight of her everyday world, but also the illogical world of dreams. Full of jewels of colour, the dreams of the poet invite recollections of the surrealism of Bosch and the imagism of Dufy (and indeed the nightmarish quality of certain scenes in Famous Last Words, e. g. Wally Windsor's Fiery Fête). Webb sees herself in the company of such artists who attempt an understanding of the world through their works. Together they exist in the continuum of "Our voluptuous questing..."(50).

Following the meditative form of Zen Buddhism, Webb organizes the third section along the lines of the questioning technique known as Koan, complications. Koan is the technique in which paradoxical questions and answers are created for the purpose of inducing the practitioner to realize that all conceptualizations are wrong or at best ineffectual (Singh and Sirisena 5). The paradoxical questions and answers which involve the poet are the view of
the Riviera and the images in her dreams. The chaotic nature of these scenes provoke anxiety and dismay within Webb, and, as a result, she has no words for the images of torture in section four of the poem:

Extracted toenails.  
I have nothing to say.

Burns on the breasts.  
I have nothing to say.

Electric shock.  
I have nothing to say.

Beatings.  
I have nothing to say.

....  
Done. Take it away (51).

The curtness of the words and lines illustrate a finality (also evident in "Still there are Wars and Crimes of War") to the desire for an answer to the indecencies of life, and the poet seeks solace in the surroundings of the natural world of her island.

It is in the comfort of the island that Webb, momentarily, is able to come to terms with the perpetual motion of questions and answers. She spies "the red-crested woodpecker" among the trees and follows its flight. Initially she wants to know everything about it:

and wanting the bird  
to be still and
wanting it moving  
whiteflash of underwings  
dazzling all questions  
out of me, amazement
and outbreathing  
become a form  
of my knowing (52)
She realizes, however, that this leads her back to the overwhelming questions. She expresses this dilemma of her wanting to know and wanting simply to experience the wonder of the woodpecker in the form of the inner self, "the deceiving angel’s in-shadow" (52), arguing with the outer self for control of her thoughts. The inner self successfully overrides the poet’s contemplation of death when she passes the dead deer on the beach:

The angel insists, 'Keep walking. It has all the time in the world. Is sufficient. Is alone. Keep walking,' it says and flies off with my head (53).

She allows herself a split-second of experiencing the moment without words, but a connection with a headless man of the past reminds her of her place within space and time (similar to Mauberley’s moment of recognition in the caves at Altamira). The red-crested woodpecker returns to poise itself on "her trunk":

Dryocopus pileatus. 'Spectacular, black, Crow-sized woodpecker with a red crest, great size, sweeping wingbeats, flashing white underwing.' Pileated woodpecker. Posing. Many questions (53).

His presence inspires her to embrace once again the duality of certainty and uncertainty, and, armed with this reaffirmation, she has the will simply to be. The meditation continues beyond the scope of the poem into the next section of the collection, "Artifacts."
In this section Webb confronts the personal guilt she feels over the death of her friend, Lilo Berliner. She systematically follows her friend's obsessions with the past (most specifically the legacy of the Haida Indians carved on a rockface at Wilson's Bowl) through her tortured questing for identity ("The Bowl," "In this Place," "The Place is Where You Find It") to her death, "the manic ride out in the bay" ("The Place is Where You Find It" 68). In the process Webb herself undergoes a transformation in which she accepts the chaotic nature of life:

'I took the path
I crossed the signs.

I crossed the path
I took the signs.'

Dark sounds.
Dark sounds (Untitled 67).

In the concluding poem of the section, "Imperfect Sestina," Webb crams Haida mythology, images of mirrors, twins, crossings and stones and a repetitive reference to illumination into her variation on a sestina. Just as Webb herself visits and revisits the petroglyphs of Wilson's Bowl, so the reader can return to the multiple layers of interpretation in the poem. On one level, Webb fixes on deception, both as behavioural ploy and poetic device. She uses the Haida figure of the Raven in extended metaphor. His role as trickster/transformer provides a frame for Webb's picture of duplicity/endurance (Boelscher, 178). In
a similar manner, Findley depicts the Duchess of Windsor in a series of masks and masques which reveal her artifice but also her ongoing need for self-definition:

There she was: resplendent. Wallis descending in a gold glass cage...Her cage, of course, was a lift embossed with gold but every wall and even the floor was glass and it fell, like a flake of ice, without a sound (FLW 179).

Just as Findley sees the fragility of Wallis Simpson (despite her bravado), Webb, in "Imperfect Sestina," acknowledges her own human frailty before the trickster Raven, "got up in feathers and a mask of stone"(72).

On another level, Webb concerns herself with the possibility of extinction: "I have seen both open and closed eyes at the double crossing,/and even as I lay there dying I saw the mirror"(72). Despite her sense of foreboding, she reaches a turning point, leading her to the realization (the envoy) that she herself will endure:

Laughing and crying, twin meets at the crossing twin. They do not ask the mirror. Gold licks of illumination. Eden smells of cedar. Raven holds his wings and sucks his stone. (73)

Technically Webb alters the traditional sestina, using her reformulating of its lines to reflect the ephemeral yet resilient world of the poem. Like the Raven, Webb is poised, anticipating regeneration.

The final section of Wilson's Bowl is Webb's paean to both the natural season and the regeneration of herself and
the world. In "Eschatology of Spring" she moves with whirlwind effect from "the azaleas and dog-toothed violets of the South of Canada" to the death which "grows and grows in Chile and Chad," (82) illustrating that she is irrevocably caught up in the endless cycles of life and death. The entire poem operates on the principle of eruption, of "abrupt birth." Language explodes and implodes. The "bloody judgement of the six o'clock news" and "the deadlines of rotting newspapers" give a "quick" birth to the events of the world only to die instantaneously. Their decay serves as the fertilizer for the tumultuous events in South America and Africa. The events of the socio-political world in turn serve, figuratively, to feed the vegetation on Webb's island:

    ...Quick, for the small bones pinch
    me and insects divulge occult excrement
    in the service of my hyacinth, my trailing
    begonia (82).

Similarly, world events in Famous Last Words tumble relentlessly into one another until they reach cataclysmic proportions. It remains for Quinn to deal with their incremental effects as revealed in the story on the wall. The novel ends on a note of relative calm and resignation, whereas Webb's poem ends with her personal reconciliation with the disparate elements of existence:

    ...And if you catch me resting
    beside the stream, sighing against
    the headlines of this pastoral, take
up your gun, the flowers blossoming
from its barrel, and join this grief, this
grief: that there are lambs, elegant black-
footed lambs in this island's eschatology,
Beloved (82).

She is in awe of the fact that within chaos there is a
redeeming quality, the gentleness of a lamb. Her final
poem, "The Days of the Unicorns," echoes this sentiment.
Though she will continue to be haunted and hounded by
malevolent forces both personal and political, for this
moment, Webb is at rest.

In Wilson's Bowl, whether addressing political and
philosophical issues or examining ideas which she finds
troubling, Webb constantly faces a world of polarities --
power and powerlessness, chaos and order. The result is a
very intimate exploration of duality. Findley, in Famous
Last Words, being once removed from his material, is more
objective than Webb. Although he does not present a formal
meditation on understanding good and evil and the survival
of the human spirit, he incorporates his perspective of
these complex issues into the character of Quinn.

On the surface, Quinn's task is to read the story on
the walls, but the reading is complicated by Freyberg's
running commentary in which he tries to undermine the
validity of the inscribed material. In addition, the
nightmarish quality of certain passages sucks Quinn into an
emotional vortex. Subsequently he begins to have involved
surreal dreams. When he awakes, he faces the perpetual
antagonism of Freyberg.

On one occasion the two men debate about the role that the Windors play in Mauberley's tale. Freyberg is sarcastic and denigrating while Quinn, backed into a corner by his superior, gets defensive about them:

"I've finished reading the walls up to where it says they were married."
"Yes sir."
"And I've noted it doesn't say they lived happily ever after."
"No sir."
"Isn't that kind of odd—for a fairy tale? Not to say they lived happily ever after?"
"Maybe, sir. But this isn't a fairy tale."
"Oh, yes. I forgot. It's mythology" (FLW 153).

The argument continues with each man stating his own idea of truth. Freyberg sees the story as a whitewash of the truth, whereas Quinn naively believes that the "truth" lies in Mauberley's acknowledgement of his mistakes. Quinn realizes, however, that he has more to read and so returns to the walls, just as Webb revisits the petroglyphs of Wilson's Bowl. Quinn's "illumination" is not yet complete, for he still places great faith in his own ability as an interpreter: "It was his job to assess what was there and to pass that assessment on to Freyberg. And nothing in the rule book said his assessment could not be his own" (FLW 148).

Findley then leads Quinn through a number of small epiphanies which deepen his definition of the role assigned
to him by Freyberg. After many verbal skirmishes with Freyberg, he is finally able to best the captain in a discussion about the Germans' colour patches for undesirables:

Then Freyberg said: "I don't think your colour's there, Lieutenant Quinn."

"Well at least you're lucky, sir," he said. "No trouble picking the colours for you. Like I said--the yellow and the black go together okay."
Freyberg's tongue made a foray over his bottom lip and then retreated behind his teeth. "I'm not a Jew," he said (FLW 221).

After absorbing the further revelations of horror on the walls, Quinn must confront his own demons, which appear to him in his dreams. This aspect of Quinn's struggle is reminiscent of Webb's ordering of dream and reality in "A Question of Questions." The account of the fire at the Windsors' party in Nassau proves to be the turning point for Quinn. With the death of fifty-five civilians seared into his brain, he leaves the hotel to confront an actual blizzard and the storm of his own thoughts: "...with every step, Quinn tried to hate himself for having made the mistake of thinking they [the fascists] were human beings. And for having memorized their names" (FLW 292).

Findley brings Quinn to a final "reading" of the walls and himself. In a last confrontation with Freyberg, Quinn rejects the captain's obsession with documentation (i.e. actual photographs of the victims of the Holocaust) in
favour of a multi-faceted illumination -- his own memory, Mauberley's story, and even what he gleans from his arguments with Freyberg. Despite Freyberg's final mocking gesture toward him, Quinn is able to make a semblance of peace in his leave-taking of the Elysium Hotel. Armed with his own carefully selected mementoes, "the scarf he had lifted from Mauberley and in his kit the two dusty halves of the Alfred Cortot recording of the Schubert Sonata," (FLW 394) Quinn dates the story, May 1945. Thus he has added his mark to Mauberley's testament. In essence he believes the story. Findley has allowed Quinn to look into the heart of darkness and yet survive. However, Findley, like Webb, knows that chaos has not been conquered but momentarily assuaged.

The two writers are now poised to enter further interpretative modes in which they will again struggle with concepts of power. Webb commits herself to the eighth century Persian lyric, the ghazal, in Water and Light. Frequently her thematic purpose entails shedding light on marginalized aspects of society. Findley, in Not Wanted On The Voyage, turns to the Biblical myth of the Flood. He tells the story as a fable/mock-epic and demythologizes scripture "to foster and sustain the spirit that questions and rebels" (Woodcock, "Timothy Findley's Gnostic Parable" 237).
It is Webb’s ghazal sequence, "I Daniel," which provides a bridge between Wilson’s Bowl and Famous Last Words on the one side and Water and Light and Not Wanted On The Voyage on the other. The poem characterizes both Webb’s and Findley’s consistent thematic concerns. Webb pictures an individual, the Old Testament Daniel, facing chaotic circumstances as a captive of Babylonian kings. She uses Daniel’s interpretation of dreams with the same intent that Findley has for Quinn. Daniel has tremendous powers of divination, but he grieves over his servitude, his powerlessness. He can read circumstances, but he cannot change them:

Confusion of faces, yours among them,  
the poetry tangled, no vision of my own to speak of.

The hand moved along the wall.  
I was able to read, that’s all (WL 39).

Webb and Findley, like Daniel, in their poetical and fictional explorations of their observable worlds, perpetually encounter paradox and duality. In Water and Light Webb utilizes a tight poetic structure, but, within it, she shows a fluidity of language and idea, indicative of her comfort with "the land of only what is" (WL 61). Findley, in Not Wanted On The Voyage, sets his characters within the confined space of the ark and the constraint of their patriarchal traditions. Within this microcosm, little by little, small gains in autonomy are made by various
figures. Although freedom does not necessarily reign by the novel’s end, there is a small measure of hope, a prayer for rain. Webb and Findley separately, and from time to time on the same wave length, continue to stand amidst the flux of time. They know that they cannot stay it, but they can leave their creative mark upon on it.

Notes

1. In her essay, "Up the Ladder: Notes on the Creative Process," Webb details the creative impetus for the poem, "Vasarely." Her explanatory notes emphasize the ambiguous relationship she has with her subject matter: "I put it [discussion on line-breaks] aside, cross to my desk and take a postcard of a Vasarely painting called "Tridim-C," painted in 1968. I look at it briefly. All that year I had been receiving Vasarely cards from two separately travelling friends. I had looked at them often and had even used them in a First Year Creative Writing drama class as ideas for stage sets and examples of shifting perspectives. The poem begins to emerge from under the layers of paint, under the layers of guilt, of repression, into the codes of play, trance and language" (Talking 54).

2. In an interview with the writer, Findley discussed how the figure of Ezra Pound haunted him for many years after the publication of FLW. Findley states that he had to come to understand "the pain" which caused Ezra Pound to be, his "unreasonable hate," and he had to forgive himself for misunderstanding Pound. The Trials of Ezra Pound (1990 Pebble Productions Inc. [Radio Version]) represents Findley's struggle to understand that there are no "absolutely imperfect or pure figures" in the world, but simply flawed human beings.

3. In "A Correspondence," Webb expands upon her relationship with Lilo Berliner, a reference librarian at the University of Victoria, and Berliner's obsession with signs and symbols and her correspondence with noted anthropologist and professor at University of British Columbia, Wilson Duff (Talking 129-149). Both this essay and Webb's poetry sequence, "Artifacts," illustrate that, despite painful associations, humankind can survive.

4. According to The Oxford Companion to English Literature, 4th edition, a sestina is "a kind of poem having six six-line stanzas and a three-line envoy: the end words of the first stanza are repeated with progressively changed order in the other five stanzas and are included, medially and finally, in the envoy."
Webb, in "Up the Ladder," explains how her sestina became a bastard form: "The imperfections in "Imperfect Sestina" which begin to occur in the fourth stanza with the word "illumination" came about through speed of writing and the workings of the unconscious. I have learned to pay attention to so-called mistakes, and this one told me that "illumination" wanted to take over the poem. I therefore reinforced the mistake by repeating the word insistently, disrupting the compulsive sestina form with another compulsion which shed more light" (Talking 60).
CHAPTER THREE

Here. Now. Always.
("Performance," Hanging Fire 68)

Webb's Water and Light and Findley's Not Wanted On The Voyage show the writers' ongoing thematic preoccupation with flux and chaos and their portrayal of the small, individual triumphs possible within an uncertain world. It is Webb's poem "Leaning" that serves as the guide to the very definite link between the two writers at this juncture. Perched on top of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, Webb spreads herself out physically and metaphysically:

I am leaning out of the Leaning Tower heading into the middle distance

where a fur-blue star contracts, becomes the ice-pond Brueghel's figures are skating on. ("Middle Distance" 58)

Leaning out she views a world of distortions, of optical illusions. The earth "slouches." The sludge on the walls "hiccup." The things of nature expand and contract at will. The couplets lean into one another, emphasizing the poet's lack of balance. Webb uses the language of geometry, words of position and precision, "perpendicular, "horizontal," "curvature," in her attempt to make sense of a world out of kilter.

She experiences the physical fact of vertigo, which causes a tornado of thought:

my sick head on the table where I write slumped one degree from the horizontal ("Middle Distance" 58).
Figures of the past who played with notions of perception and dimension in art, architecture, and science shoot out like stars -- Rodin, Mies van Der Rohe, Columbus, Einstein and Bohr. They are joined by the "smelly tourists," the "you" and the poet who, "hav[ing] paid good lira," (WL 59) are enthralled by grandeur in stone and the grandiose flow of human striving. The poem ends with Webb commending herself and those who withstand this apocalyptic experience of light and dark:

And you, are you still here

tilting in this stranded ark
blind and seeing in the dark ("Middle Distance" 59).

Within the flux and darkness there is sight and human survival.

Findley picks up on the last three lines of Webb’s poem. The words ark, blind, and dark are stimuli for him. He suddenly envisions the unfolding plot of Not Wanted On The Voyage:

Hearing these words -- I made a sort of strangled sound -- like oomph! It was just as if I had been struck in the solar plexus...and all at once, I knew who all my people were and what their predicament was. The gin-loving farm wife was Mrs. Noyes -- the abusive farmer was her husband, Noah -- the blizzard was the Great Flood and Mrs. Noyes would not get on the Ark without her cat -- the blind cat, Mottyl....(Inside Memory 220).

Findley, identifying with the skewed dimensions present in Webb’s poem, constructs his novel. Where Webb encapsulates, Findley elaborates. He explores and exposes the problems of
social order. Like Webb, he praises those who, despite the stranglehold which this order imposes, are able to assert their individuality. His conclusion echoes the ending of Webb's poem:

Mrs. Noyes said; "I didn't mean to wake you. I'm sorry. Sorry--but not sorry. Watch with me, Motty -- you blind and me with eyes, beneath the moon. We're here, dear. No matter what--we're here. And--damn it all--I guess we're here to stay" (NWOTV 352).

Thematically, both Webb and Findley have again given their unqualified yes to those who ride out the flood, who survive. Their aesthetic expressions, of course, are different. Both artists choose structural forms that suit their ideas of space within constraint.

Webb, in Water and Light, turns to the ghazal form¹ as found in the poetry of Mizra Asadullah Beg Khan (Ghalib).² Webb describes the ghazal:

"Drunken and amatory" with a "clandestine order," the subject of the traditional Ghazal was usually love, the Beloved representing not a particular woman but an idealized and universal image of Love. The couplets (usually a minimum of five) were totally unlike the conventional English couplet and were composed with an ear and an eye to music and song (The Vision Tree Selected Poems 156-157).

She admires the conventional lyricism of the form, but also recognizes its playfulness. Susan Glickman, in "'Proceeding Before the Amorous Invisible'" , states that the ghazal, despite its concrete rhythm, rhyme, alliteration and associative imagery, is a "discursively obscure structure."
The arrangement of ideas, images and feelings in response to the particular events in the poem is not always clearly
defined (50). Thus, the mutability of the form is conducive to the volatile temperament of the poet of *Naked Poems* and *Wilson's Bowl*.

Webb's first ghazal adheres to a fairly regular rhythm, but her thought illustrates that a commitment to the ideal is not viable in her reality:

A magic carpet, a prayer mat, red.  
A knocked off head of somebody on her broken knees.  
("Sunday Water" 9)

In her last ghazal, Webb bids farewell to another "modal possibility" (*Webb, How Do I Love Thee* 70):

Ah Ghalib, you are drinking too much,  
your lines are becoming maudlin (*Middle Distance* 60).

In between, Webb experiments with the limits of the form. What results is a collection of poems which "tend toward the particular, the dialectical and private" (*Webb, The Vision Tree Selected Poems* 157). Running through them is an elusive, yet discernible, commentary on the struggles of the marginal in society. They are anti ghazals which detail the storms of the creative process ("Sunday Water Thirteen Anti Ghazals"), are replete with avian images of feathers, hues and flight ("The Birds" and "Frivolities") and also contain the quest for a third eye ("I, Daniel"). Again Webb reconciles with "the flow, the flux, even the effluent stormy/in high wind, dashing into the poison mind" ("Sunday Water" 16) by recognizing the beauty of a "whole culture leaning..." (*Middle Distance* 58).
While Webb alters the ghazal, playing with its nuances, she nevertheless respects the original form and commits herself to retaining its dual sense of discipline and delight in her anti-ghazals. Findley, in *Not Wanted On The Voyage*, is more radical, proffering his revisionist version of the story of the Flood. As Donna Penne suggests, Findley
take[s] what is familiar and defamiliarizes it in the interests of alerting [humankind] to how [it] may be implicated in the continuance of texts, traditions or world views that violate, oppress, and devalue, as the Bible does women, children, animals and the environment (*Praying for Rain* 14).

Although there is a subtle undercurrent of opposition to oppression in Webb’s *Water and Light*, Findley in *Not Wanted On The Voyage* is more overt. With his accustomed verve, he emphatically addresses issues of marginalization and domineering patriarchy and individuals’ attempts to overcome bullying and brutality. With a pattern similar to that found in Webb’s self-imposed boundaries of form and material, Findley organizes his fable with three specific points of reference to self-realization/survival. The story (Book One and Book Two) begins with a literal storm in which Mrs. Noyes struggles both with the outer elements and her inner tumult over Noah’s tyranny. There are intimations that she will assert her individuality. Aboard the ark (Book Three), she is joined below deck by her disenfranchised family members. Their minor insurrections, the second step toward independence, lead to a final
skirmish with Noah and the others on the upper deck (Book Four). While the Lower Orders' command of the ship is only temporary, they have forever gained their freedom, for they now see Noah for what he is, a great manipulator. Findley, in choosing to limit the main action of his story to the ark, uses a dramatic device, a multi-faceted single set, which gives him a focus similar to Webb's in the anti ghazals. Both writers, having control through such formal structures, concentrate on their customary thematic concerns.

Structurally, Findley uses a conventional linear plotline while Webb freely leaps from couplet to couplet, thought to thought. Nevertheless, in Books One and Two of Not Wanted On The Voyage and in "Sunday Water", the first section of Water and Light, there is a parallel thematic ordering of the writers' experience. Both present a world at odds with the status quo. Couched within Findley's traditional storytelling are "postmodernist leanings" (Keith 130) discerned in the voices or "rhetorics" (Pennee 27) of the characters who articulate their defiance of the dominant power structure (Noah and the Edicts of Yaweh). Webb launches herself into a "textual space full of possibilities" in which she is free to question through "puns, allusions, echoes, borrowings, and intense modalities of language" (Barbour 11-12) the "domination of a male power culture" (Webb, Foreword, Wilson's Bowl i). At the core of
the first sections of *Not Wanted On The Voyage* and *Water and Light* is the human impetus to flee from oppression.

At the outset of their respective works, Webb and Findley set the tone for the reading of their densely-textured material. Both *Water and Light* and *Not Wanted On The Voyage* contain rich images of duality -- concealment and revelation, water and light, excursion and end of the world -- which challenge conventional notions of how people/events are perceived. Webb, in her first four anti ghazals, is poised for flight. She alternately embraces and rejects family, neighbourly activity and the world at large:

The universe opens. I close.  
And open, just to surprise you ("Sunday Water" 10).

She feels constrained and conveys the sense that she wishes to go, both formally and conceptually, beyond self-imposed and societal boundaries:

I fly from the wide-open mouth of the seraphim.  
Something or someone always wants to improve me ("Sunday Water" 11).

Webb further dreads that her freedom of flight is endangered, like that of the American eagle. She anticipates the apocalypse with every crash in the night. Webb's complex emotional make-up is apparent in even the simplest of her images, and dark sounds echo throughout her lines:

Come loves, little sheep, into  
the barricades of the Fall Fair ("Sunday Water" 10).
There is no antediluvian world in Webb’s anti ghazals, just as there is no garden of Eden for the characters in Findley’s novel.

*Not Wanted On The Voyage* begins with a passage from the book of Genesis but quickly cuts to a commentary which offsets the biblical text:

> EVERYONE KNOWS it wasn’t like that.

> To begin with, they make it sound as if there wasn’t any argument; as if there wasn’t any panic—no one being pushed aside—no one being trampled—none of the animals howling—none of the people screaming blue murder. They make it sound as if the only people who wanted to get on board were Doctor Noyes and his family. Presumably, everyone else (the rest of the human race, so to speak) stood off waving gaily, behind a distant barricade: SPECTATORS WILL NOT CROSS THE YELLOW LINE and: THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION. With all the baggage labelled: WANTED or NOT WANTED ON THE VOYAGE (3).

As Donna Pennee suggests,

> the book forces us back to a literal reading of the biblical text long enough to see the implications of drowning the world, to consider all those who were not wanted on the voyage, and to think what it might mean to have believed and lived by the values implied by the biblical story of Noah’s ark (*Praying for Rain* 28).

The prologue closes with a nightmarish scene in which Mrs. Noyes, surrounded by flames and smoke, points a finger at Noah as the author of such a holocaust. The triptych of passages (biblical text, commentary, Mrs. Noyes in panic) serves to plant seeds of doubt concerning the original Flood story, to sound a note of doom, and to raise incipient objections to a value system which excludes certain elements
of the human race.

In Book One, Findley begins to detail his examination of the patriarchal value system. A dove flies overhead, and its bird's eye view of the land is the first intimation of a pattern of flight/sight images which become a leitmotif in the unfolding tale. The dove brings Noah the message that Yaweh (the Lord) is coming, then dies. Reaction to the news reveals an uncertain world: "Especially now, what with the order of all their lives in such disarray -- the imminence of Yaweh's arrival and the whole world in chaos" (21). Soon it is evident that the characters are struggling with traditional notions of loyalty and obedience on the one hand and with nascent yearnings for individuality and free will on the other. In a manner similar to Webb, Findley exposes societal constraint and advocates for the power of the imagination, which raises up the disenfranchised if only for a moment. The foreboding atmosphere in which the characters labour is a constant reminder of the apocalyptic nature of Findley's tale.

The dreaded Yaweh arrives, and, while given to godly pronouncements, He is ultimately petulant over what He sees as a failed experiment, the creation gone awry. After deciding the fate of the world, its destruction by flood, Yaweh dies: "It was so...and by closing the door, the Lord God Father of All Creation had consented to His own death" (112). Findley shows a God who, despite His will to
control, is powerless:

The Lord God Yaweh, who was about to step into the air, was more than seven hundred years older than His friend Doctor Noyes, kneeling now in the road before Him. Whatever age this produced, it was inconceivable to Emma. To Mottyl, it was meaningless. Her Lord Creator was a walking sack of bones and hair. She also suspected, from His smell, that He was human (66).

Unfortunately, those who are not aware of this godly impotence heed His original Edict, and their lot involves much suffering.

In Water and Light, Webb devotes one anti ghazal to the subject of Yahweh.3 As she sees Him:

Yahweh is a speckled bird pecking at treebark. We are the insects most excellent to his taste. ("Sunday Water" 14)

He is a devouring God who, along with other painful elements in her life, saps her creativity. She then contemplates how Yahweh generally constrains and stifles the creation:

The eggs of Yahweh crack in the tight nest. Too big his bright wings. Too heavy his warm breast. ("Sunday Water" 14)

Both Findley and Webb are critical of a traditional Judeo-Christian God who is, in their schema, outmoded. Webb has only to dismiss Him. Findley dispatches Him, but impugns Him, even after His death, as the author of misery and negativism among his creatures. He forges ahead and illustrates the idea of a negating God through his development of characters who all suffer in a paternalistic culture. Webb, however, is less concerned with the delineation of a constraining God than she is with
lamentations over a personally restrictive social milieu. Their psychic connection lies in each writer’s noting that the first victims of misdirected control are always the lower orders, namely women and animals.

There is a sense of community among the animals in Findley’s *Not Wanted On The Voyage*. In the tradition of Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* and Richard Adams’ *Watership Down* Findley’s animals speak, have distinct personalities and are astute observers of their own and human interaction. By natural laws some feed on others, but they share a sensitivity about each other’s instincts and patterns. Mottyl knows that the reclusive Unicorn (more fantastically real than mythical here)⁴ exists on a diet of flowers. Crowe flies overhead, noting births and deaths in the woods, but, over these events, there hovers the threat of some impending doom:

*Indeed.*

*Indeed.*

*Be more afraid* (55).

Yaweh arrives and delivers his Edict. The horrendous rounding up of the animals by twos then follows:

What they saw was an endless rolling mass of backs and shoulders and heads, pushing upward against the wind and through the dust, some of the heads held high, with horns or antlers, others butting low with massive brows and sand-blinded eyes. All of them were crying out in confusion and fear and many were calling to their abandoned young or to others of their kind who were penned or corralled or stabled--doomed (123).
Logically, any creature not on the ark would have drowned in time, but Findley adds his imprint to the Flood narrative. Noah determines to present Yaweh with a final burnt offering and sets the outside world aflame. In images reminiscent of the Fiery Fête in Famous Last Words, Findley depicts the suffering of the animals in the ensuing holocaust:

Nothing she [Mrs. Noyes] saw that moved had feet or legs--but only arms and necks and heads--and everything was floating--heaving up through the waves of smoke like beasts who broke the surface of a drowning pool, then sank and broke again. And again--and then were gone (124).

Certain survivors of the fire rush frantically toward the ark, but Whistler, the gopher, alone decides to wait out the storm:

No. He would wait. In time, the mass would thin--and the panic lessen--and he would cross his field, moving upwards through the rain, and over to the east--and he would sit in his favourite burrow and watch the world's last days from there (191).

For Findley the gopher's stoic resignation is symbolic of the animal kingdom's powerlessness in the face of the will of man.

Webb, in her anti ghazals, articulates a variation of the theme of entrapment. She feels that societal conventions impede her creative endeavours:

My morning poem destroyed by the good neighbour policy. Mrs. Olsson, organic gardener, lectures me on the good life. ("Sunday Water" 13)

Webb’s plight is not life threatening, but, like the animals in Not Wanted On The Voyage confined in a less than idyllic
ark, she is chafed by the "tics and flickers" (13) and the
enthusiasms of others in her imperfect personal sphere. She
turns to animal imagery when she wants to express
helplessness about herself as a writer of poems:

    Damned dark hole! Rabbit
    in her rabbit warren, pushing them out
    ("Sunday Water" 13).

She is quick to consider universal helplessness under the
control of a "grand design." Again the animals are her
metaphor for resignation to conformity: "All the big
animals turn toward the Great Wall of China" ("Sunday Water"
13) Like Findley, Webb sees that patient suffering is part
of the creature's lot. In another anti ghazal she
illustrates this idea with reference to women as well as
animals.

    The poem is wrapped in images of the "closing down of
summer" (the apt title of a story by Alistair MacLeod) 5 and
the opening of a peacock's tail on a greeting card. In
between, Webb depicts the limits under which "women writers"
labour. There is an element of the subversive in "their
heads bent under the light,/work[ing] late at their kitchen
Tables" ("Sunday Water" 12). Webb then focuses on her own
creative impediments. She thinks first of the fragile
hummingbird chased away by winter, then leaps to compare
herself, wilting before societal elements, to T. S. Eliot's
J. Alfred Prufrock. She visualizes the spectre of
mediocrity: "I have lost my passion." Indeed she wallows
in a moment of self-negation:
So. So. So. Ah -- to have a name like Wah when the deep purple falls ("Sunday Water" 12). The peacock greeting card revitalizes her, and the bird with its spreading tail connotes a possibility of movement outwards. There is a sense that Webb and the greater company of women writers can find freedom despite an ongoing struggle with themselves and the expectations of society.

The women of *Not Wanted On The Voyage* face a struggle with a male power culture which parallels Webb's striving for creative control. Each woman -- Mrs. Noyes, Hannah, Emma, the Orlando-like Lucy -- and Motty, the female cat, initially suffer in silence. Mrs. Noyes contends with an ever-present anger, her reaction to a domineering husband:

"Mrs. Noyes was afraid of her anger and she did her best to subdue it in the twilight. She was afraid of all the things she wanted to say--and might: the things she wanted to do and couldn't. She was afraid of her ignorance: her fear of all the things she didn't know, but felt (21)."

Eventually she begins to speak her mind, asserting herself in small ways. Hannah has secret yearnings for power but mistakenly believes that she will get what she desires by being obedient to Noah. Emma, separated from her family, becomes a servant to her in-laws and leads a marginal existence. Motty, on the creature level, knows that, should she bear another litter of kittens, Noah will kill her babies. She tries to stifle her nurturing instincts. Standing seven feet tall amidst the other women, Lucy (the angel/messenger Lucifer), in a flowing robe of saffron,
chooses a feminine role. Seen as a vamp or camp figure by the humans around her, Lucy nevertheless has a very serious intent:

It was the great cry of life: of all that lived
Feed me.
That was why Lucy had joined the human race.
Survival. In order to survive the holocaust in heaven.
In order to prevent the holocaust on earth (110).

With the exception of Hannah (who is chosen to join Noah on the upper deck), the women rally together in a supportive effort to endure and to find emancipation.

Webb and Findley continue to delineate women's struggle for an independent voice. Both writers use literal storms to illustrate states of emotional and intellectual upheaval. For Webb the turmoil is personal. As an artist she recognizes the natural beauty in the power of a storm:

"Trees downed by a gale. Seawrack matting/the shore, the morning after" ("Sunday Water" 16). However, she further sees it as symbolic of her own powerlessness in the face of the weather, the cycle of the seasons, and the limited span of her creative productivity:

Pathetic fallacies deep in these bones.
Pathetic oneness with weathers and cosmic dust ("Sunday Water" 16).

In the following anti ghazal Webb adds "time" to tempest:

Sun on the Sunday water in November.
Dead leaves on wet ground. The ferry leaves on time ("Sunday Water" 17).
She cannot escape clocks, watches and their ticking, and she bemoans the fact that time is fleeing before her, and she cannot stay it:

Time in your flight--0--a wristwatch strapped to my heart, ticking erratically, winding down ("Sunday Water" 17).

A third anti ghazal shows Webb in a psychic maelstrom. The poem moves cosmically and syntactically down and across the page. She is torn because what she wants to achieve seems forever beyond her grasp. Once again she feels constraint, hemmed in by "Days and nights, sun, moon--the up-there claptrap" ("Sunday Water" 18). She even sees restrictions in the safeguards of everyday life and the ring circling the poet's finger:

And down here, trappings of 'as above'--crosswalks, traffic lights, sirens, this alexandrite burning on this hand ("Sunday Water" 18).

This sequence of anti ghazals is Webb's ongoing attempt to "seek shape and seek meaning" (Hanging Fire 21) amidst the chaotic storms, both sensory and spiritual, which threaten to overwhelm her individuality and creative impetus.

Findley depicts in his characterization of Mrs. Noyes one woman's battle against the natural elements and the forces of tyranny. Her tribulations as she attempts to fulfill her own needs are archetypical of every woman's fears and longings. With the storm as backdrop, Mrs. Noyes toils on behalf of meek and gentle creatures, such as
Mottyl, her cat, and Lotte, the mutant child. She even makes a beginning at speaking up for herself. When Noah decrees that Mrs. Noyes cannot bring her cat aboard the ark, she confronts him:

"You could make an exception."
"Oh? But why should I?"
"BECAUSE SHE IS MINE!"

... "I shall not come with you, Noah. If my cat— if Mottyl may not come, then I shall not come" (128).

Her threat is not only directed to Noah, but is a defiance of the Edict. He responds to her challenge by striking her. Mrs. Noyes' refusal to continue in her submissive role results in Noah's act of domestic violence. He believes that the door to rebellion has been firmly closed, but in fact it has been left ajar:

"...we shall be glad we have done our duty. Yes?"
No.
She would not be glad.
And she would not forgive him.
Ever.
Very slowly, it began to rain (129-30).

Mrs. Noyes flees from Noah's patriarchal authority. Subsequently, she encounters marginal figures for whom she becomes a champion. In looking for her cat, she comes upon Lotte, whose parents have abandoned her. While working to save the mutant from a raging river, Mrs. Noyes also serves as an ark for some Faeries who ride in her hair to the far bank. She determines that she will bring the child aboard Noah's ark, and that she will reveal the secret of her own
mutant son’s birth and his drowning by the hand of his father. On board she tries to bargain for Lotte’s life only to be deceived: "[S]afe, at last. You’re safe, at last—as I promised.’ She should have known better" (167).

When Lotte is slain, Mrs. Noyes once again leaves the ark. She has relied on alcohol to help her bear the pain of her existence, and now she drinks herself into a stupor. She vacillates between profound thoughts, including assertions of selfhood, and fear of her imminent death:

Well: I’m not drowned yet. Still here alive. Still me—and, in fact, a little more me than I was before all this began...
What now, old lady?
One last look at everything—and down the Hill to die.
I DON’T WANT TO DIE (182).

At length, having renounced God, she resolves to cast her lot with the marginalized (animals and others not wanted on the voyage), and she utters a brief prayer of resignation for herself. To her surprise a voice responds Amen. It is Crowe who leads her to her cat.

Revitalized, she returns to the ark and, by playing the submissive wife, is able to sneak her beloved pet and the bird past Noah: "‘Yes, sir,’ said Mrs. Noyes. And she went on board—with her apples [buried beneath which are Motty and Crowe]" (189). This time Mrs. Noyes stays on the ark for the duration of the voyage. She has grown "in wisdom and in stature" (Luke 2:52). Her independence is now sufficient for her to move toward an eventual, outright
rebellion in Book Three and Book Four.

The essence of Mrs. Noyes' struggle with self and circumstance in Book Two is reminiscent of Webb's perpetual concern with creative freedom and control in "Sunday Water." Near the end of this section of Water and Light, Webb encapsulates her thoughts on the nature of artistic expression that defies the limits of convention. In one anti ghazal she employs an extended bird/flight image to illustrate ways of breaking out of a conventional pattern with its predetermined limitations. She depicts a particular grouping of birds, raucous-voiced, brightly coloured and restricted in their powers of flight:

Tuned lyre (lyrebird, mynah, parrot, parakeet, peacock) paradox -

not musical, though the brilliant plumage variegated for those who do not

sing well ("Sunday Water" 19)

Despite the inhibitive aspects of their particular avian identities, they nevertheless make an impression. Their colouroation and their shrieks and screams compensate for their inability to soar, allowing them their own brand of flight:

and coloured enough, though featherless, for a kind of flying ("Sunday Water" 19).

These birds are like Mrs. Noyes. In the face of assigned roles, both they and she are yet able to make an impression, expanding the definition of how they are seen by others and the manner in which they express themselves.
In the final anti ghazal of "Sunday Water," Webb turns to oracular imagery. Just as Mrs. Noyes reaches a point of clearer vision, Webb is now seeing her future path with its potential for growth and personal fulfillment. Webb, always receptive to external stimuli, opens herself up to visionary or prophetic influences:

Now for the Third Eye to read the grown signs: flickers of doubt tic mouth, twitch eye's lid.

But it's open - always - the third one, guardian of splendidours, crimes.

Seeing all, all-seeing, even in sleep knows space (outer, inner, around), tracks freak snows slumbering ponies ("Sunday Water" 21).

Neither Webb the poet nor Findley's character, however, make sweeping gestures for they are still subject to trepidation over the consequences of their actions: "Love, I am timid/before this oracular seer, opal, apple of my eye" (21). Webb, in "The Birds," the next section of Water and Light, faces a continuing, pervading darkness that threatens to envelop her creativity. Findley, in Book Three of Not Wanted On The Voyage, portrays the gloom of life in the ark for Mrs. Noyes and the others who exist under the pall of patriarchy.

The sombre notes heard throughout Webb's "The Birds" are clearly sounded in two particular anti ghazals. In the first Webb is obsessed with killings, the annihilation of selfhood. She moves from private tortures to public, national conflicts:
Yoko Ono was seen in the Empress Hotel today. She can never be seen for herself alone again.

Shots ring out in Iran, Afghanistan, El Salvador ("The Birds" 25).

She indicts humankind for its predatory nature. She depicts herself as party to the carnage for "[i]n [her] own hand a flea died only yesterday" ("The Birds" 25), and she projects that she lures the birds to crash against her window:

I sat in my quilted jacket calling the birds whose warning cries strike just beyond the window ("The Birds" 25).

Her sense of impending doom continues in the other anti ghazal where she is harried by the crows in the wood, "shooting out flares from [their] winter gangland/bouncing the bough with hurrumphs," and inflamed upon reading the newspaper's "Incendiaries of the Bad News" ("The Birds" 31). She feels constrained to ask God/the gods why He/they torment her with malevolence in nature and evil in world event:

What do you mean in this religious dark damming me with feathers and your hot light? ("The Birds" 31).

The sense of foreboding that Webb feels is similar to the ominous elements of Book Three in Not Wanted On The Voyage. The individuals in the dismal hold of the ark wrestle with variations of Webb's question. They are literally confined by the vessel as well as held captive by the prevailing Edict.

The family is divided into factions. Noah fosters notions of war to maintain his authority:
And of this present new beginning -- whose symbol was the ark -- Noah had been appointed steward. And, as such, he had already seen the seeds of ruin sprouting: in his wife; in Ham [son] and Lucy. These three were already at work in the bowels of the ark -- spreading opposition to the Edict -- drawing the lines between the will of Yaweh and the mere will of men.

But they would not be allowed to prevail. Noah had sworn it. All he need do was maintain his power amongst the others.

This time, success. This time, mastery by whatever means. This time, the will of God would triumph, no matter what the cost (239).

As a result of Noah's determination, acts of destruction abound. Japeth kills a school of dolphins that Mrs. Noyes sees as friends. While enduring the forcible breaching of her hymen, Emma is mutilated. The unicorn, whose horn was used to do the job, is subsequently slaughtered by Japeth. Mrs. Noyes's cry reverberates over each painful scene: "'Oh -- everyone...Why must we be so helpless here, and so unhappy?'" (230).

Such bewilderment is echoed in two of Webb's anti ghazals. Her "grey-eyed dryad" evokes the presence of the unicorn in Not Wanted On The Voyage. Such creatures -- dryad, unicorn and faeries -- exist at the whim of humans who also have the power to deny and extinguish them:

path of portent, accident, perishable
eye-sad dryad. Look at her. Here ("The Birds" 28).

Just as the dryad and the unicorn are marginalized, subject to human caprice, Webb's female birds in the "birds of a feather" anti ghazal are subjugated, bound by traditional notions of femininity and maternity. Webb sees them as caught up in a stifling nesting cycle. Like female humans,
the birds are bound to reproduce with docility:

Your little eggs drop into the thatched nest
just like that -- phlup, phlup, phlup --
speckled, tinted, and, within, miniatures
of your own birdiness held in suspension
("The Birds" 26).

Their domestic routine does not permit grand flights. Even
with a deteriorating environment threatening them, they
continue to do what they always have done: "Ladies, ladies,
how you confound me/with your embroidered eyes, your
faithful smiles/your dear familiar songs" ("The Birds" 26).
Webb’s observation of this submissiveness is akin to
Findley’s portrayal of Hannah’s compliance with the Edict.

Hannah is in the ironic position of suffering for her
conscious decision to sit on the right-hand side of Noah.
Instead of aligning herself with the marginal family members
who are gradually attaining freedom, she finds herself alone
in her obedience:

...Hannah wanted to renege on all the holds and
checks she had maintained with such care for so long.
She wanted to admit she was afraid: she wanted
to tell about her loneliness: she wanted to say out
loud; I am in pain. She wanted to tell about the
child she was afraid had died inside her. And about
the blood she was passing (267).

She persists in advocating submission to Noah when she
speaks with Emma, who has been mutilated. Even during the
first revolt of the Lower Orders, Hannah, despite her own
pain, continues to support Noah:
Hannah stood near Noah's shoulder, holding the black umbrella above the old man. She had thrown the tails of her shawl around her neck and drawn its cloth up over her mouth and nose, so that only her eyes could be seen. These remained downcast (308).

This picture of Hannah as a passive Middle Eastern woman calls to mind an image in the "Middle Distance" section of Water and Light:

Oh You who keep disappearing behind a black cloud like a woman behind her veil (56)

Hannah retains her passivity until the birth of her mutant, stillborn child (fathered, as it is revealed, by Noah and not her husband, Shem). During the period in which she is keeping her silent vigil of pain, the others are becoming militant.

The Lower Orders rally around the body of the slain unicorn, listening to Lucy give an impassioned speech on the possibility of another way of living:

'...Somewhere--there must be somewhere where darkness and light are reconciled. So I am starting a rumour, here and now, of yet another world. I don't know when it will present itself--I don't know where it will be. But--as with all those other worlds now past--when it is ready, I intend to go there' (284).

She turns to go, but Mrs. Noyes cries out for her to wait:

"'Even if it takes a thousand years--we want to come with you..."' (284). Despite the suffering which they have endured at the hands of Noah and his lackeys, Shem and Japeth, the victimized are survivors who are hopeful that
they will find a safe haven for themselves. At the end of Book Three, there is a sense that the downtrodden prevail because they listen to the "human heart -- still beating" (Keith 133). Phyllis Webb expresses this very sentiment:

The varied thrush, the orchad oriole,
the crying dove, the skin-smooth olive
green, olive-green, with a red pimiento
heart ("The Birds" 29).

Notwithstanding Webb’s first person confrontations with the dark forces of existence and Findley’s dramatization of painful truths through fable, both writers work slowly toward the light. Findley accomplishes this by his narrative shift. His characters mount two insurrections, the second of which is moderately successful. On the other hand, Webb breaks out and reaffirms her poetic credo, the need to write, face change, and write again. In the "Frivolities" section there are three anti ghazals that have reference to her craft and her energy to pursue it beyond conventional boundaries. "My soul, my soul" depicts the poet musing about the choice of subject matter (in this case family), but wanting to leap beyond the mundane:

cold as the curse of mere matter, Mere matter, the subject family, the repeated

word ready to pounce out of the thunder out of the rain-forest where leap the wild, bereft deer ("Frivolities" 46).

The topic of the following anti ghazal is still the writer’s motive, but the images are exotic. Webb refers to a "haiku
butterfly," and coins the word Fishstar (which may hearken back to the *Naked Poems* or may be a play on the word Ishtar). ⁹ She writes "lines" which "are also hungry/biting a hole in the yellow paper" ("Frivolities" 47) and she leaves the poem, imagining that she herself is the embodiment of this mysterious, magical Fishstar. Webb more and more places her faith in the power of the imagination. In "The purple orchid" anti ghazal she creates romantic couplets filled with flowers, music and, always, poetry, their "many scents and various hues beguil[ing] [her]" ("Frivolities" 51). She opens herself, revitalizing the "eye-sad dryad" ("The Birds" 28) in the depiction of her childhood:

> Once in the early dawn of my childhood  
> I stood in a garden and saw the Queen of the Fairies  
> step on a single drop of dew ("Frivolities" 51).

Webb is reclaiming a place for magic amidst the chaos and destructive forces of the world.

Findley has his own version of reclamation through the two revolts in Book Four. In each act of rebellion his characters utilize their creativity in confronting the ruling order. Lucy, never one to be bound by caste, by labels, enlists the demons (along with dragons, the lowest of the lower orders) to burn a hole through the door to the upper deck: "'Done...We're free!'" (302). However, Japeth has been hiding in the Armoury with his wolves, and he stops the Lower Orders in their tracks. Lucy refuses to admit
defeat and vows that they will resume their efforts on behalf of freedom: "...If you’re wise -- you’ll regard what we’ve done tonight not as failure, but as a rehearsal. And one we can turn to our advantage..." (304).

In the second revolt the rebels become even more creative. They send Crowe to Emma who has been on the upper deck since her mutilation. She begins to pull the boards from her side of the door. During this arduous task, she (like Webb) is sustained by memories of her childhood with her family. In spite of the fact that Japeth kills Crowe, Emma is able to break through the barrier, allowing the others to rush to the upper deck and to overpower Japeth. The old order is irrevocably broken. Noah, while he still clings desperately to the Edict, is a tired, old man. His magic cannot stand up to the ingenuity of Mrs. Noyes, Lucy, Ham, Emma and Motty. All that he has left is a cheap conjurer’s trick:

Emma said; "I thought the rainbow was awfully pretty, didn’t you?"
Lucy said; "yes. As pretty as a paper whale" (351).

It is given to Mrs. Noyes to articulate an affirmation of life as it is and will be for those who stand against the constraints of the unimaginative: "’No matter what -- we’re here. And -- damn it all -- I guess we’re here to stay’" (352).

Webb, like Findley’s Mrs. Noyes, sees herself as "here, feet planted/on the ground" ("Middle Distance" 57) in "The
Authors' anti ghazal. She knows her own human limitations and the pain associated with remembering and with risk taking. She finds herself weeping, but in the end she is able to assert: "Poor Fishstar! Yet - all is not lost"("Middle Distance" 57). Her declaration is reiterated in her final anti ghazal to Ghalib. She sees that Ghalib spoke to his time, and she believes that so she speaks to hers. She finds meaning in the fact that humankind endures:

upturned. In the blue and white jar
a cherry branch, dark pink in moonlight -
from the land of
only what is ("Middle Distance" 61).

In Water and Light, Phyllis Webb deals on a personal level with issues of individual freedom and constraint within society. In Not Wanted On The Voyage, Timothy Findley addresses the same problems, but he is able to give voice to his ideas through his large and varied cast of characters. Individually and collectively, their works stand as a testament to the perseverance and survival of those who weather the storms of chaos.

Webb's and Findley's common artistic concerns are seen both in textual coincidences and in their obvious influences on each other. While their actual subject matter may differ, given Webb's personal, poetic sensibilities and Findley's global, fictional observations, both writers are preoccupied with the problems of societal constraint and numbing chaos. Each, in a particular field of play (Webb's
"nakedness" and Findley's exposure to war; her petroglyphs and his writings on the wall; her anti ghazals and his Ark), works through the various aspects of life which puzzle them.

The comparison between Webb's *Naked Poems* (1965) and Findley's *The Wars* (1977), despite the obvious chronological gap between them, proves to be fortuitous, because in these works both poet and novelist move beyond the struggles of early authorship. They begin to create space for themselves in which they have freedom to assert their artistic vision with a subsequent maturation of purpose and form in Wilson's *Bowl* (1980) and *Famous Last Words* (1981) and *Water and Light* (1984) and *Not Wanted On The Voyage* (1984). The incidental parallels of the first two works of this study broaden out to become the point/counterpoint of the ongoing "psychic connection" between Webb and Findley. They find inspiration in each other's words: a phrase from one of Webb's poems suggests the plot of an entire Findley novel. A definitive study comparing the works of Webb and Findley remains a work in progress/process, for each continues to explore the nature of the apocalypse that burns in the worlds of their experience and within the heart of poetry and fiction.

**Notes**

1. The ghazal's origins can be traced to the eighth century. Initially ghazals were written in Urdu, an amalgam of the medieval languages of Northern India (Bhasha, Khari, Boli and others) and languages of the Middle East, mainly Persia. From the 15th century to the latter half of the 19th century the form became part of the larger Persian-Indic tradition.
In the closing decades of the 19th century, Urdu began to assimilate Western forms and concepts through the growing influence of English throughout the subcontinent (Aijaz xv).

Formally the ghazal is a poem made up of couplets (from five to an indeterminant number); each couplet is wholly independent of any other in meaning and complete in itself as a unit of thought, emotion and communication. The couplets' only link is in terms of prosodic structure and rhymes. The first couplet rhymes, and the second line of each succeeding couplet is to rhyme with the opening couplet.

Webb, in Water and Light, breaks from the tradition in that she does not follow the rigid rhyme structure. She, however, does, commit to the essence of the form: "All the poems taken together create a single, intense impression of life lived in fact and in mutual relations of fact"(Aijaz xxiv). See Randhir's Ghazal The Beauty Eternal for further details about the ghazal form.

2. Mizra Asadullah Beg Khan (1797-1869). The British conquest of India was completed during his lifetime. As Aijaz Ahmad notes, in Ghazals of Ghalib, at this time the fabric of the entire Indian civilization came loose, and the city of Delhi became a major focal point for "countless dramatic crises." As a result, Ghalib's writings reflect the tumult of the time. He wrote a poetry of "losses and consequent grief" and also of "what was, what could have been possible, but was no longer"(vii).

Ghalib, through his ghazals, sought endurance in a world that was growing for him, as well as others of his time, increasingly unbearable. Webb's antighazals resound with variations on Ghalib's themes.

3. Webb uses the Hebrew (Old Testament) spelling of the name of God. Findley alters the spelling of the name to serve his revisionist purpose.

4. Both Findley and Webb use the unicorn as a symbol for creativity and the element of the imagination in our psyche. See Webb's "The Days of the Unicorns" in Wilson's Bowl. In Inside Memory Findley recounts how he and Phyllis Webb saw and fed one of these mythical creatures on Salt Spring Island: "Today, however, we all went up in the car and there he was. He came across the field and met us at the fence...I don't know when we [Bill Whitehead and Findley] will be coming back to Saltspring--but I hope that when we do, the Unicorn will be here. I cannot think of him any other way. Magical and not quite earthbound"(233).


6. Canadian poet Fred Wah. "When the deep purple falls" is a popular American love song by Mitchell Parish and Peter De Rose (1939) (American Popular Songs, 1966). All the allusions in this particular anti ghazal (T. S. Eliot, Wah, the greeting card, American pop culture) resound with the sentimental and underscore Webb's moment of self-negation.

7. See Virginia Woolf's Orlando. An encapsulation of Woolf's adrogyous vision, the character lives three and one half centuries, first as a man and then as a woman.
8. A possible allusion to Elizabeth Akers Allen's (1832-1911) "Rock Me To Sleep, Mother," a popular 19th century song:
   Backward, turn backward, Oh Time, in your flight,
   Make me a child again, just for to-night
   (The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations 2nd Ed. 4)
   The writer is indebted to Dr. Susan Wendt-Hildebrandt for this suggestion. The line "Time in Your Flight -- O --" could also be an allusion to Hubert Evans' autobiographical novel O Time in Your Flight (1979). In it, Evans recounts the story of a young Ontario boy who is bound by familial responsibility and yet yearns for the freedom of the far west. Clashes with his parents finally confirm the boy's belief that his freedom and future lie in far-off British Columbia (The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature, 1983). Webb's Water and Light contains similar conflicting ideals of freedom (poetic assertions) and responsibility (societal restraints). She, too, looked to the west coast for release and found it on Salt Spring Island.

9. Webb's Naked Poems begins with an incantation:
   star fish
   fish star
   Webb's Fishstar, in her anti ghazals, recalls these lines. Fishstar can also be seen as an allusion to Ishtar, the Babylonian and Assyrian goddess of love and fertility.
Works Cited


Works Consulted


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